STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN AN EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY PRACTICUM

WENDY MAPULE MALEKANE

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STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN AN EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY PRACTICUM

by

Wendy Mapule Malekane

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

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SUPERVISOR:
Prof. L. Ebersöhn

CO-SUPERVISOR:
Dr. C.J. Gerda Bender

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DECLARATION

I, Wendy Mapule Malekane (22201760), hereby declare that all the resources that were consulted are included in the reference list and that this study is my original work.

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W.M.Malekane

2009

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DEDICATION

I wish to extend my sincere love and gratitude to my family. To my mother, Paula Carvalho-Malekane, my siblings Natasha, Shaun and Flika, as well as my partner, Rasheed Musa for always supporting me in everything I have done and for their incredible understanding, patience and their unconditional love.

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Supervisor	:	Prof. L. Ebersöhn
Co-supervisor	:	Dr. C.J. Bender
Institution	:	Department of Educational Psychology, University of Pretoria
Degree	:	MEd (Educational Psychology)

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe students' experiences of community engagement in an Educational Psychology practicum. The theoretical framework was Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory. The study consulted relevant literature relating to community engagement, the experiences of students of community engagement activities, such as service-learning; the asset-based approach, positive psychology and the learning strategies relevant to the community engagement practice, namely experiential and reflective learning. A qualitative research approach was applied, guided by an interpretivist epistemology. An instrumental case study design was employed and the Department of Educational Psychology of the University of Pretoria, which was involved in the community engagement practicum, was conveniently selected for this research study. I selected one focus group for a pilot study, and later selected a second focus group, consisting of 8 purposefully selected students of the MEd Educational Psychology degree, as my research participants. Focus group interviews, reflective journals and visual data served as data collection methods. And, to further enrich the data collection process, audio-visual methods and a personal reflective journal also served as methods of data documentation.

Four main themes emerged as the result of *thematic analysis* and interpretation. Firstly, during the focus group interview, the students conversed about how they **gained insight into themselves as Educational Psychologists within South Africa,** such as their experiences of encountering individuals from different socio-economic groups, cultures, race and language. Secondly, the students also **experienced professional development** as a result of their experiences from the Educational Psychology community engagement practicum. That included experiencing themselves as being more confident, able to adapt to new situations and deeper insight into their role as a professional. Thirdly, the students discussed **experiences related to integration of theory and practice.** Their ability to understand theories, such as the asset-based approach and positive psychology, was enhanced as a result of putting it into practice. Finally, the students had **experiences relating to structuring a community engagement practicum.** The students expressed the need to receive additional information on the orientation and preparation of the practicum, as at times they had felt unsure of what

was expected of them. They experienced the time spent in the practicum as being limited and discussed their experiences of writing in a reflective journal and participating in reflective dialogue.

Based on the findings, community engagement in this Educational Psychology practicum can be regarded as being a valuable inclusion to the training programme of these students of Educational Psychology, as it gave them the opportunity to interact with diverse clients in a South African setting. As a result of experiential learning during the practicum, students acquired several skills that they would not have gained in a classroom setting, such as the ability to work with diversity, groups, different age groups and in different contexts.

LIST OF KEY WORDS:

Asset-based approach	Engagement
Community	Practicum
Community engagement	Positive psychology
Educational Psychology	Reflective learning
Experiential learning	Service-Learning
Experience	Student

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CHAPTER 1
OVERVIEW AND RATIONALE

TITLE →	Students' experiences of community engagement in an Educational Psychology practicum
RATIONALE →	To contribute to the emerging knowledge based field of curricular community engagement theory and practice
PURPOSE →	To be exploratory and descriptive
RESEARCH QUESTION →	What are students' experiences of an educational psychology practicum in relation to their community engagement in a MEd Educational Psychology module?
METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH →	Qualitative approach
UNIT OF ANALYSIS →	Educational Psychology students who participated in a practicum, which is a practicum in a MEd Educational Psychology module
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS →	Informed consent and voluntary participation, confidentiality and anonymity and protection from harm
KEY CONCEPTS →	Educational Psychology students, experiences, community engagement, experiential learning, reflective learning, service-learning, the asset-based approach and positive psychology

1.1   INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

In recent years the pressure on universities worldwide, including universities in South Africa, to bridge the gap between higher education and society, to become active partners with communities, has increased. That situation has directed universities to become further 'engaged institutions' and has helped reduce inequity (Bender, 2008b). The White Paper 3 (1997) laid the foundation for making community service or, rather, community

engagement an integral part of higher education within South Africa. The White Paper (1997) called on institutions to demonstrate their commitment to the common good and their social responsibility by making their expertise and infrastructure available to the community at large. The White Paper (1997) stated further that a goal of higher education should be to promote and develop an awareness of social responsibility among students, both socially and economically, through community engagement programmes (Bender, 2007; Bender, Daniels, Lazarus, Naude & Sattar, 2006).

Since the release of the White Paper 3 (1997) perceptions of community service have shifted from viewing it as one of the three pillars of thought of higher education (along with teaching and research) to develop the view that community service should be an integral part of teaching and research, infusing and enriching the latter two functions of higher education with a sense of context, relevance and application. In addition, along with this change in perception has been a shift in the terminology used by higher education institutions from "community service" to "community engagement" (Bender *et al*, 2006). The University of Pretoria has, as have the other universities in South Africa, developed an appreciative understanding of the potential that community engagement holds for transforming higher education in relation to societal needs and, consequently, for producing graduates who have a sense of civic responsibility and an ability to apply the theory of their disciplines to local developmental issues (Bender, 2007).

Because of those recent developments in higher education institutions, Pillay (2003) has indicated that psychologists need to be trained and supervised to work in communities within the South African context. According to Pretorius-Heuchert and Ahmed (2001), reasons for this need include: there are too many people with psychological problems and too few people to help; and there is a lack of financial and physical resources and traditional mental health services provide inefficient, ineffective and inappropriate services. In addition, societal factors, such as apartheid, poverty and oppression, caused psychological problems and stressors, so there is a need for intervention within the larger system (Pillay, 2003; Pillay, 2006).

However, in a document titled "*Scope of practice for practitioners registered under the auspices of the professional board for psychology"* (Health Professionals Council of South Africa, 2009), the Health Professionals Council of South Africa makes no reference to community engagement activities as being part of the scope of practice or training for Educational Psychologists. Nevertheless, that document does mention the importance of working in diverse settings or contexts. One example of how training of Educational Psychologists has changed to accommodate the changes in the scope of practice is the practicum which now forms one complete module, namely BOP 804 (Career Assessment and Counselling), within the University of Pretoria MEd Educational Psychology Programme (Ebersöhn, 2007). That module provides the Educational Psychology students the opportunity to work within a community that is at a secondary school in a rural area.

It is, therefore, important that exploration and investigation into community engagement activities within academic programmes is undertaken; especially in the South African context, as most of the current research has been done by American scholars within the context of the United States of America higher education (Bender, 2008a).

A discussion of the changing Scope of Practice of Educational Psychologists within the South African context will follow.

1.2   CONTEXTUALISING EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY TRAINING WITHIN A CHANGED SCOPE OF PRACTICE

1.2.1   CHANGED SCOPE OF PRACTICE

Pillay (2003) states that to make the training of Educational Psychologists more relevant in the South African context, training should be integrated in all modules in a cohesive and holistic manner, and must be more practically orientated. Within the South African context, it has become increasingly evident that the traditional role of the educational psychologist in rendering an individually based service, whether in private practice consulting with schools or based at a school or similar agency, is not effective and does not have a sustainable impact on the children (Pillay, 2007; Lubbe & Eloff, 2004). Lubbe and Eloff (2004) state that the only way to address vast socio-economic and socio-psychological disparities and inequalities within the needs of the people of South Africa is for educational psychologists to focus more on communities, on establishing networks and partnerships, and to collaborate with the relevant stakeholders. Therefore, educational psychologists should not only be exposed to theories but also gain experience working directly with communities through practicum, fieldwork and case studies (Pillay, 2003).

Pillay (2003) identified several needs to make training and supervision of psychologists more community orientated. Those needs are as follows: it is important that educational psychologists test theory in practical situations and have cross-cultural training within a South African context; a paradigm shift must be made from individual to collective practice; students must engage in action research, whereby the psychologist engages in research activities. In addition, action research should be directed at action and intervention in terms of meeting the needs of communities. Educational psychologists should implement the ecosystemic approach in training and trainees should acquire skills to empower and mobilise people in the community to deal with social issues within the South African context. They should collaborate with the stakeholders and also acquire a repertoire of generic skills for working with communities, as, if they want to be of value to their clients and communities, they must be able to deal with a variety of problems and implement a diverse range of interventions. Psychologists should also focus on preventative, rather than curative interventions (Pillay, 2006; Pillay, 2003). Those identified strategies are currently being implemented in the curricula of several universities within South Africa, Department of Educational Psychology and master's (or MEd) training programmes; thereby contributing to the changed scope of the Educational Psychologist (Pillay, 2003).

1.2.1.1   Changed educational psychology training

Pillay (2003) states that the training for educational psychologists has to prepare them to function within an ecosystemic paradigm, which focuses on prevention and mass intervention, while developing theory and research, especially within the context of oppressed and disadvantaged communities. He further states that, there is a need that educational psychologists fulfil different roles, to get closer to their communities and community organisations, in order to focus on prevention as well as to expand their interventions (Pillay, 2003). In addition, by working in communities and non-urban areas, students are exposed to the need to be critical of existing methods of psychology and encouraged to make adjustments to their techniques, or to learn more appropriate intervention methods. It is vital that students understand the need to tailor their approach to suit the needs of their clients. It is also important that students in those contexts are aware of the worldview of their clients and the communities they serve. Respect for, and acknowledgement of, the values and beliefs of their clients will go a long way in developing and strengthening their therapeutic relationships (Pillay & Kometsi, 2007).

1.2.1.2   Indicators of community engagement activities in educational psychology training at three institutions of higher learning

The previous scope of educational psychology was embedded in pathological practices, in which educational psychologists exclusively used need-based approaches in their practices. In addition, it is important to take cognisance of the fact that the psychological theories that were implemented usually had their roots in Europe and North America and were never adapted or redefined to become meaningful within the South African context (Stead & Watson, 2006). To address their quandary, the Academics in the University of Pretoria, Department of Educational Psychology shifted their focus towards assets within individuals and their environments, while at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), community centred training was implemented. Likewise, of late educational psychologists in South Africa began to expand their services by engaging in efforts within communities and employing theories and techniques indigenous to the South African context.

The Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria has implemented several forms of curricular community engagement, whereby the faculty employs the scholarly expertise and resources of the academic staff and students to render mutually beneficial services to local, regional and national communities, in a collaborative partnership. In that faculty, 'community engagement' is regarded as the continuously negotiated collaborations and partnerships between the faculty and the constituencies with which it interacts, such as schools, service agencies, government and non-government organisations, with the purpose of building and exchanging the knowledge, skills, expertise and resources required to develop and sustain those societies (Bender, 2008b).

However, community engagement activities are not particular to only the Department of Education at the University of Pretoria. The Faculty of Education at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) is an example of a South African tertiary institution implementing community engagement through service-learning. In a telephonic

conversation, Dr Elzette Fritz, the MEd (Educational Psychology) Coordinator at UJ, informed to me that, as part of their practicum module (EPP 0028), the MEd (Educational Psychology) students are required to do 200 hours practicum during a period of two years, in 12 community sites. Those community sites are found within the vicinity of that university and include schools and other community centres. The purpose of these service-learning activities is for their educational psychology students to develop an in-depth, comprehensive and systematic practice of community educational psychology within a socially critical and constructivist psychology framework; to demonstrate relevant professional practice through the management of clients in an autonomous, professional and ethical way, while under appropriate supervision; to have critical self-evaluation and continued independent learning for continuing professional development; and finally, to demonstrate the capacity to integrate educational psychology specialisation knowledge in practiced experience. The UJ MEd (Educational Psychology) practicum is an example of how academics at South African Higher Education Institutions integrate service-learning in educational psychology training programmes (Fritz, 2008).

Another South African tertiary institution implementing community engagement through service- learning is the Faculty of Education at the University of Stellenbosch (US). In a conversation over the telephone, Mrs Lynette Collair, the MEd (Educational Psychology) Coordinator at the University of Stellenbosch, communicated to me that, as part of their practicum module, the MEd (Educational Psychology) students are, in response to the expressed need of the school concerned, placed on a weekly basis at 6 to 8 community schools, where they provide psych-educational services. Their work at those schools is based on a service-learning model and is credit bearing. Those students also collaborate with the Western Cape Education Department's District Offices, where they join a collaborative team that provides whole school intervention strategies at schools. The whole school intervention strategy differs each year, depending on the capacity of the District Offices to accommodate them. In addition, those students offer a consultation service in a clinic setting within the Department, where they counsel parents from a range of different socio-economic backgrounds. The purpose of such service-learning activities is for the students to have several learning opportunities in the learning areas of assessment, therapy, whole school development, learning support and preventative class-based programmes (Collair, 2008).

The focus of this research study is on the Career Assessment and Counselling module (BOP 804), which gave certain students the opportunity to engage in a community engagement practicum at a secondary school in Mpumalanga Province. The module will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2 (see par. 2.2).

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.3.1 PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the students' experiences of community engagement in an Educational Psychology practicum with the aim of answering the following *primary research question:*

What are students' experiences of an Educational Psychology practicum relating to community engagement in a module of a MEd Educational Psychology programme?

1.3.2 SUB QUESTIONS

In addressing the above-mentioned primary question, the following *sub questions* were explored:

- How can knowledge regarding student's experiences of an educational psychology practicum relating to community engagement contribute to educational psychology theory and practice?
- How can knowledge regarding students' experiences of an educational psychology practicum relating to community engagement contribute to curricular community engagement theory and practice?
- How do students' experiences of an educational psychology practicum relate to the criteria for service-learning?

1.4 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe students' experiences of community engagement in an educational psychology practicum, to enrich insight into applying community engagement in the training of educational psychologists, and, possibly, to inform curricular community engagement theory and practice. I aimed to accomplish this task by exploring current literature on community engagement, to discover how students have experienced community engagement within an educational psychology practicum in the past. From the preliminary literature survey (see Chapter 2), it became apparent there is limited literature of community engagement activities within the South African context. In addition, most of the literature on community engagement activities had its focus on a number of disciplines, except that of Educational Psychology.

1.5 CONCEPTUAL PARAMETERS

For the sake of elucidation, key concepts used in this research study are discussed below. A more in-depth discussion of the concepts is, however, provided in Chapter 2.

1.5.1 EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Lubbe and Eloff (2004) define 'educational psychology' as the discipline that concerns itself with theories and practices in psychology and education and the intersections between psychology and education. Furthermore, Educational Psychologists assess, diagnose and intervene, in order to facilitate the psychological adjustment and development of children and adolescents within the contexts of family, school, social or peer groups and communities (Lubbe & Eloff, 2004).

1.5.2 STUDENT

The Oxford dictionary defines a 'student' as an individual who is studying at a university or other place of higher education. In addition, this also denotes someone who is studying in order to enter a particular profession (Soanes & Stevenson, 2005).

1.5.3 PRACTICUM

The American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology refers to a practicum as a diversified and comprehensive training experience for students planning to become professional practitioners in a given field. An instructor or other experienced practitioner provides management of the on-site experience (Vandenbos, 2007).

1.5.4 ASSET-BASED APPROACH

The 'asset-based approach' (Eloff and Ebersöhn, 2006) is based on the stance of working from what is present in a given family or community, focusing on the assets of individuals, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), associations and institutions. On an individual level, 'assets' refer to the talents, gifts and skills that a person has to offer and on a broader level to the resources, talents and skills within a community (Lubbe & Eloff, 2004).

The University of Pretoria MEd (Educational Psychology) practicum integrates asset-based thinking in the theoretical grounding. A further discussion on the asset-based approach can be found in Chapter 2 (see par. 2.2).

1.5.5 POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Positive psychology is the scientific study of optimal human functioning. At the meta-psychological level, it aims to redress the imbalance in psychological research and practice by calling attention to the positive aspects of human functioning and experience. At the pragmatic level, it is about understanding the wellsprings, processes and mechanisms that lead to desirable outcomes (Linley, Joseph, Harrington & Wood, 2006:5).

The field of positive psychology, at the subjective level, is about valued subjective experiences, such as well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present). At the individual level, it is about positive individual traits, namely: the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future mindedness, spirituality, high talent, and wisdom. At the group level, it is about the civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship such as responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

The University of Pretoria MEd (Educational Psychology) practicum integrates positive psychology thinking in the theoretical grounding. A further discussion on positive psychology can be found in Chapter 2 (see par. 2.2).

1.5.6 COMMUNITY

Within the service-learning (see paragraph 1.5.11) context, 'communities' refers to those specific, local, collective interest groups that participate in the service-learning activities of the institution. Such communities are regarded as partners (i.e. no longer as 'recipients'), who have a full say in the identification of service needs and development challenges. Further, such communities: participate in defining the service-learning and development outcomes; identify the relevant assets that they have in place; evaluate the impact; and contribute substantially to the mutual search for sustainable solutions to challenges. In the South African context the members of such 'communities' will generally be disadvantaged, materially poor inhabitants of under-serviced urban, peri-urban or rural areas. In many instances those communities may be accessed most efficiently through service sector organisations, such as government or state departments, as well as non-governmental, community-based or faith-based organisations (Bender *et al.* 2006:24).

For this study, the focus will be on the school-community at a secondary school in Mpumalanga. The school is in a rural area and is a partner with the University of Pretoria, Department of Educational Psychology. The partnership is with the Grade 9 learners, as well as educators for educational psychological practice experience. In addition, the partnership involves working closely with the school and educators, to help address career and learning challenges that the learners may have and to assist those learners to gain skills in their learning at school, so that they can be better equipped to support themselves during their further education and after leaving school (Ebersöhn, 2009). Hence, when discussing that community I will be referring to both the school and its members; the learners and educators.

1.5.7 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Quality Committee of the Council on Higher Education (Higher Education Quality Committee, 2004a:24), cited in Bender (2008b), provides the following definition of community engagement (CE): community engagement can be defined as the initiatives and processes through which the expertise of the higher education institution in the areas of teaching and research are applied to address issues relevant to its community. Community engagement finds expression in a variety of forms, which range from informal and relatively unstructured activities to formal and structured academic programmes addressed at particular community needs (service-learning programmes). Some projects might be conducive towards the creation of a better environment for community engagement and others might be directly related to teaching, learning and research (Higher Education Quality Committee, 2004a:24). A further discussion on community engagement can be found in Chapter 2 (see par. 2.3.2).

1.5.8 EXPERIENCE

Beard and Wilson (2006:16) highlight the Oxford Dictionary's definition of 'experience', as "*The fact of being consciously the subject of a state or condition; of being consciously affected by an event; a state or condition viewed subjectively; an event by which one is affected; and, knowledge resulting from actual observation or from what one has undergone.*"

Experience is not simply an event which happens; it is an event with meaning (Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993). Boud *et al.* (1993) consider meaning to be an essential part of experience and suggest that experience is a meaningful encounter. Experience is not just an observation or a passive undergoing of something, but an active engagement with the environment, of which the learner is an important part. The indicators of experience will be discussed in Chapter 2 (see par. 2.5.1).

1.5.9 EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

To Geldenhuys (1999), 'experiential learning' is based on the experiential learning theory of Kolb. According to that theory, learning is a cyclical process that consists of four steps, namely, concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation (Collier & Williams, 2005). The cycle entails an experience that must be observed and reflected on to identify its elements. A concept is then formulated to express the experience in relation to previous experiences and we then generalise by predicting whether similar consequences are likely to recur if we repeat certain behaviours in other situations. Those predictions are then tested, a new experience is constituted, and the process is repeated. The theory on experiential learning was utilised as a theoretical framework to understand data on experiences. That theory is further discussed in Chapter 2 (see par.2.4.1).

1.5.10 REFLECTIVE LEARNING

'Reflective learning' is an intentional process whereby the social context and experience of the learner are acknowledged. Learners are active individuals, wholly present, engaging with one another, open to challenge, and the outcome involves transformation as well as improvement for both individuals and their profession (Brockbank, McGill & Beech, 2002).

'Reflection' is purposeful thinking and an integral part of learning. It helps students to progress and improve the quality of their learning experiences. Reflective learning should be encouraged, promoted, and become central to higher education (Harrison, Short & Roberts, 2003). A further discussion on 'reflective learning' can be found in Chapter 2 (see par. 2.4.2).

1.5.11 SERVICE-LEARNING

At the University of Pretoria, 'service-learning' is defined as "*a module-based, credit-bearing, experiential educational approach, involving learning activities in which students —*

- *participate in contextualised, well-structured and organised service activities aimed at addressing identified service needs in a community, and*

- *through structured reflection, students examine and analyse their service experiences critically so that they gain a deeper understanding of the linkage between curriculum content and service, as well as achieve personal growth and a sense of social responsibility"* (University of Pretoria, 2009).

A further discussion on service-learning can be found in Chapter 2 (see par. 2.3.4.5).

1.6 EPISTEMOLOGY

For the purpose of this study the interpretivist paradigm was employed. When seen from an interpretivist point of view, according to Schwandt (2000), what distinguishes human (social) action from the movement of physical objects is that the former is inherently meaningful. Thus, to understand a particular social action, the inquirer must grasp the meanings that constitute that action. To say that human action is meaningful is to claim either that it has a certain intentional content that indicates the kind of action it is and/or that what an action means can be grasped only in terms of the system to which it belongs. He continues to explain that one must grasp the situation in which human actions make (or acquire) meaning in order to say one has an understanding of the particular action (Schwandt, 2000). Through conducting a qualitative approach, anchored in interpretivism, I was enabled to conduct this study within the natural setting of each participant, to enhance an understanding of the ways in which students of Educational Psychology experience their community engagement practicum. Furthermore, this study was based on the interpretation and understanding of research participants' perceptions and interpretations of their experiences gained through the Educational Psychology community engagement practicum (Schwandt, 2000).

1.7 METHODOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS

McMillan and Schumacher (2001) state that qualitative research is used to describe and analyse people's individual and collective thoughts, perceptions, beliefs and social actions. That implies my analysis and interpretation of the experiences of the students in an Educational Psychology practicum were based on the meanings and perceptions of the research participants.

1.8 RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Table 1.1 serves as a summary of the research design and the research methodology strategies employed during this research study, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Firstly, table 1.1 indicates that I employed an

instrumental case study design to gain rich and thick descriptions of the students' experiences of community engagement in an Educational Psychology practicum (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2003; Berg, 2001). The table further indicates that I conveniently selected to work with the support of the Department of Educational Psychology of the University of Pretoria as, at the time of this study, that department was already conducting practicum in Mpumalanga. Therefore, I also purposefully selected a group of students of Educational Psychology from that same department that consisted of 8 female students. The participants were chosen with the following criteria in mind: Each participant had been a student of the Masters Educational Psychology who had participated in the Educational Psychology practicum (Cohen *et al.*, 2003; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). In addition, the table indicates that multiple data collection methods were employed, namely; (i) Focus group interviews (Morgan, 1997; Greeff, 2005, Nieuwenhuis, 2007b; Cohen *et al.*, 2003) (ii) reflective journals (Babbie & Mouton, 2001), as well as (iii) visual data (Cohen *et al.*, 2003; Creswell, 2008). Further, as methods of data documentation audio-visual methods, reflective journals and photographs were relied upon. Thematic analysis for data analysis and interpretation was applied, based on the integration of the data analysis methods of Terre Blanche and Durrheim, (2002), Creswell (2008), Nieuwenhuis (2007c) and De Vos (2005).

TABLE 1.1: **A SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY STRATEGIES**

Research design	Instrumental case study design
Selection of participants	Criteria for selection - ▪ Convenience sampling: Educational psychology students from the University of Pretoria that partook in the practicum. ▪ Purposeful sampling: The research participants were four students from the first focus group (pilot study) and 8 students from the second focus group.
Data collection methods	▪ Focus group interviews ▪ Reflective journals ▪ Visual data
Data documentation methods	▪ Audio-visual methods ▪ Reflective journal ▪ Photographs
Data analysis and interpretation	Thematic analysis
Measures to ensure rigour	Trustworthiness strategies: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.
Ethical considerations	Informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, anonymity, and protection from harm.

1.9 QUALITY CRITERIA

Throughout the research process, I consciously aimed at making my research study trustworthy. That required me to strive towards credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The quality criteria of the research study will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3 (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

1.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

For the purpose of this study, certain research ethical principles were adhered to, namely: informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, anonymity, and protection from harm (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Cohen *et al*., 2003). Those research ethical principles will be discussed at length in Chapter 3.

1.11 CHALLENGES OF THE STUDY

As this is an emerging field of knowledge, a significant gap existed within the literature with regard to knowledge relevant to this study. Therefore, this highlighted a challenge for the research process; however, at the same time it also highlighted an area of a fresh contribution to the existing body of knowledge with regard to the elements to be investigated through this study.

1.12 OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS THAT FOLLOW

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 2 outlines the conceptual framework for the study. This includes consulting the relevant and authoritative literature that relate to the students' experiences of community engagement in an Educational Psychology practicum. The MEd Educational Psychology practicum, community engagement and the learning strategies relevant to community engagement practice is discussed; namely, experiential and reflective learning. And, finally, the current literature on students' experiences of service-learning is discussed.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH PROCESS

Chapter 3 provides an outline of the research design, research methodology and the research process that were applied in this study. The proposed methods of data collection, data analysis and interpretation is outlined and justified.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS OF THE STUDY, INTERPRETATIONS AND LITERATURE CONTROL

Chapter 4 provides the presentation and discussion of the data obtained during this study. This data will be analyzed, a detailed discussion of the findings follows and, finally, an interpretation of the results is presented.

CHAPTER 5: FINAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 5, the concluding chapter, links the results of this study to the research questions posed in Chapter 1 and the findings of this study are related to existing literature in Chapter 2. The contributions as well as the challenges of this study are presented and recommendations made for further research, practice and training are suggested.

1.13   CONCLUSION

This chapter served as an introduction to the chapters that follow. The rationale and purpose of this study were discussed, the selected conceptual parameters were clarified, and the selected methodological and epistemological assumptions, as well as the research design and research methodology were presented. Finally, a broad overview of that which is to be discussed in Chapters 2-5 provided and the ethical considerations and quality criteria for this study were introduced.

In Chapter 2, a literature review of the concepts related to the study is presented. The available literature on community engagement is explored, including experiential and reflective learning, the asset-based approach and positive psychology, as well as current literature on the experience of students of community engagement activities, in order to present the conceptual framework upon which I relied in planning and undertaking this empirical study.

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CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   INTRODUCTION

The training of students in Institutions of Higher Education is twofold, although community engagement activities are not mentioned as being part of the scope of practice for practitioners of educational psychology by the Health Professions Council of South Africa, there is, nationally, a move towards community-based work and, internationally, towards Positive Psychology.

Included in Chapter 2 is a discussion on the MEd Educational Psychology practicum and community engagement. Several forms of curricular community engagement embraced in higher education are indicated and current literature on the experiences of students of service-learning is elucidated. (Figure 2.1 provides an illustration of the literature reviewed.) Lastly, as the conceptual framework for this study, experiential and reflective learning are discussed.

2.2   THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA MEd: EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY MODULE WITH PRACTICUM

One example of how training of educational psychologists at the University of Pretoria has been adjusted, to accommodate changes in their scope of practice, is seen in the changes that have already been made to the practicum in a module, namely, *Career assessment and counselling* (BOP 804), of the MEd Educational Psychology Study Programme (Ebersöhn, 2007) since 2006. That was in reply to the collaborative efforts between Professor Liesel Ebersöhn, from the Department of Educational Psychology, and educators from a rural Mpumalanga secondary school. The practicum is administrated twice a year; the first visit entails implementing planned group-based activities with grade 9 learners, in terms of assessment. The purpose of the assessment is to (i) establish rapport, (ii) get to know the learners in the group, (iii) and to determine an intervention focus for the group. The outcome of the assessment is to acquire information on the strengths and barriers of each learner, in order to plan an educational psychology intervention for that group. The second visit focuses on implementing planned group-based intervention activities. The intervention focuses on areas identified during assessment after the first visit (Ebersöhn, 2009). Each student individually develops their assessment and intervention strategy. The students travel to the school and work with groups of grade 9 learners for one-and-a-half to two hours each day during a two-day visit. The purpose of that collaboration is to create opportunities for students to develop practical experience of the (i) asset-based approach and (ii) principles of positive psychology (Ebersöhn, 2007). Those theoretical approaches are theoretical bases that also inform understandings of community engagement that are filtered into training in educational psychology at the University and into the practicum that is facilitated at the secondary school. These theories will now be discussed briefly.

PRACTICUM

- An introduction to the MEd Educational Psychology module
  - o The asset-based approach
  - o Positive psychology

(The University of Pretoria MEd Educational Psychology practicum integrates the asset-based approach and principles of positive psychology thinking in the theoretical grounding).

- Aims and tasks of the practicum
- Assessment
- Supervision

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Discussion of community engagement and curricular community engagement
- Different forms of curricular community engagement
  - o Volunteerism
  - o Community outreach
  - o Internship
  - o Co-operative education
  - o Service-learning
- Learning strategies relevant to curricular community engagement practice
  - o **Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory (Theoretical framework of research study)**
  - o Reflective learning

CHAPTER 2

STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF SERVICE-LEARNING

- Conceptualising experience
- Students' experiences of service-learning
- The role of reflection on experience
- **Theoretical indicators of experience in learning (Theoretical indicators of experience)**
  - o Experience is the foundation of, and stimulus for learning
  - o Learners actively construct their experience
  - o Learning is a holistic process
  - o Learning as socially and culturally constructed
  - o Learning is influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it occurs

FIGURE 2.1: LITERATURE REVIEW OF CHAPTER 2

2.2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE MODULE: THE ASSET-BASED APPROACH AND POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

2.2.1.1 The Asset-based approach

According to Ebersöhn and Eloff (2006), the asset-based approach is strength-based and places its emphasis on assets, resources, capacities and strengths to deal with challenges and to provide support. The asset-based approach is a bottom-up approach that shifts the emphasis from a service perspective to an enablement perspective. Consequently, the approach shifts away from a mentality of professional dominance to one in which collaboration, dynamic partnerships and participation are emphasised and practised. The asset-based approach

proposes an alternative mode for addressing and dealing with needs, whether they be the needs of an individual, a family or community. While the asset-based approach acknowledges needs, the main aim in an asset-based intervention programme is to identify assets, access assets and mobilise those assets for sustainable support. The assumption is that while needs are indeed real, they can best be addressed by focussing on assets. Thus, while the identification of problems is still an integral part of the asset-based approach, problem solving focuses on creating and rebuilding relationships between individuals, associations and institutions.

The advantages of the asset-based approach are ownership, shared responsibility, immediacy, relevancy and practicality of solutions, flexibility, mutual support and a caring environment, as well as individual capacity building. Consequently, as educational psychologists, our role as professionals, when applying the asset-based approach, is that of helping the community to realise, appreciate and utilise their talents and assets. In so doing we supply information not readily available, establish social support and networks, and forge linkages to access funding to empower communities. Therefore, power and control of funds remain within the community, to be used according to their own perceived priorities and, as professionals, we need to encourage local leadership and reduce service boundaries (Ebersöhn & Mbetse, 2003; Eloff, 2003).

The asset-based approach is based on three key characteristics, which will be discussed below. Thereafter, the main components of the approach will be discussed. The first characteristic is the focus on *assets.* Eloff (2006:27) defines assets as *skills, talents, gifts, resources, capacities and strengths that are shared with individuals, families, schools, institutions, associations, the community and organisations*. The asset-based approach focuses on what capacities, resources and *assets* are inherent in the individual and the environment, as opposed to what is absent or problematic. It focuses on indigenous assets that can be utilized in order to achieve positive and sustainable change (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Eloff, 2006; Ferreira, 2006; Pinkett, 2000). Within the context of the practicum, the students were encouraged to focus on the assets of their learners and the potential assets found in that community. The second characteristic states that the asset-based approach is *internally focused.* The asset-based approach sets out to identify the capacities inherent in individuals and in the environment. As stated before, it does not start with what is lacking or problematic, but has a strong internal focus in which problem solving and mission development come from within the individual/environment. The importance of intrinsic creativity, control and power is emphasized in the asset-based approach (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Eloff, 2006). Finally, the third characteristic describes the approach as *relationship driven.* By definition, the asset-based approach is relationship driven. According to the asset-based approach, relationships need to be built and rebuilt between individuals, local associations and institutions through the process of facilitation, based on strengths and talents of the individual involved. Reciprocity in relationships is also an essential part of the asset-based approach (Eloff, 2006).

Saidi and Karuri (2006) identify three main components of the asset-based approach, namely asset-mapping, asset mobilisation and asset management. *Asset-mapping* entails an assessment of the assets and resources of the community by community members themselves and making a graphic representation of the identified

assets in a community (Ferreira, 2007). Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) developed a methodology for mapping resources within communities, which not only involves making an inventory of the knowledge, skills and talents (the human capital) of individuals, but also of mapping associations, networks and institutions (the social capital) that exists within a community (Eloff, 2003; Emett, 2000; Pinkett, 2000). Therefore, asset-mapping involves developing interventions by identifying opportunities, capabilities and capacities in the community that can provide a basis for the benefit of the community. A significant outcome of this exercise is that community members begin to see opportunities in themselves and their environment that they previously were not aware of. Community members therefore start to regard themselves as people of value, who have assets that can be enhanced and leveraged (Saidi & Karuri, 2006). Within the context of this study, the students were required to make an asset-map of each learner in their group, the learners' school environment and their community. ***Asset mobilisation*** involves an exploration of how to access and utilise the assets and resources in the community to address the challenges facing that community (Ferreira, 2007). It also entails building collaborative partnerships between individuals, associations and institutions in order to mobilise those resources for building or developing the community (Emmett, 2000). By mobilising those assets, the community members are empowered to conceive and implement their own interventions within their community (Saidi & Karuri, 2006). ***Asset management*** demands that interventions require ongoing attention by the community and its members. That implies that individuals take ownership and responsibility to sustain actions that had been initiated, which entails continuously updating the asset-map so that the community can respond appropriately to emerging opportunities and threats (Saidi & Karuri, 2006).

In the asset-based approach sustainability is important and should be enhanced by encouraging intrinsic enablement and creativity within the community members as individuals and the community as a whole (Eloff, 2003; Ferreira, 2006). In addition, asset management entails continued involvement of the community in asset mobilisation, which will contribute positively to the growth and sustainability of the intervention within that community (Saidi & Karuri, 2006).

2.2.1.2   Positive psychology

For many years professional psychology largely ignored the study of the positive side of human behaviour. In 1998, when Martin Seligman was president of the American Psychological Association, he urged psychologists to remember psychology's forgotten mission, which was to build human strength and nurture genius (Compton, 2005). Seligman (2002) set out to create a new direction and new orientation for psychology. He called this new focus area *positive psychology.* The main purpose of positive psychology is to catalyze a change in the focus of psychology from a preoccupation with repairing the worst things in life, to building positive qualities in life. Seligman (2002) argues that the exclusive attention that was given to pathology neglected the fulfilled individual and the thriving community, and neglected the possibility that building strengths is the most important weapon that can be used in therapy (Compton, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, 2002).

'Positive psychology' is defined by Sheldon and King (2001:216) as *"the scientific study of ordinary human strengths and virtues, which adopts a more open and appreciative perspective regarding human potentials, motives, and capacities."* Positive psychology uses psychological theory, research and intervention techniques to understand the positive, the adaptive, the creative, and the emotionally fulfilling elements of human behaviour. Therefore, positive psychology studies what people do right and how they manage to do it. Positive psychology also helps people develop those qualities that lead to greater fulfilment for themselves and for others. It aims to discover and promote factors that allow individuals, communities, and societies to thrive and flourish (Compton, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, 2002). By having to implement positive psychology during the practicum, the students of Educational Psychology worked with the learners' *intrinsic* strengths, resources and assets, rather than focusing on pathology.

According to Compton (2005), positive psychology can be described in more detail by referring to the three pillars: First, at the su*bjective level*, positive psychology looks at ***positive subjective states or positive emotions***, such as happiness, joy, satisfaction with life, relaxation, love, intimacy, and contentment. Positive constructive states can also include constructive thoughts about the self and the future, such as optimism and hope. It can also include feelings of energy, vitality and confidence, or the effects of positive emotions; an example of this is laughter.

At the *individual level*, positive psychology focuses on the study of ***positive individual traits***, or the most enduring persistent behaviour patterns seen in people over time. This might include individual traits, such as courage, wisdom, persistence or honesty. Positive psychology includes the study of positive behaviour and traits that are used to define "character strengths" or virtues. It can also include the ability to develop aesthetic sensibility or the ability to tap into creative potentials and the drive to pursue excellence. Lastly, at the *group or societal level*, positive psychology focuses on ***development, creation, and maintenance of positive situations***. In this area, positive psychology focuses on addressing issues, such as the development of civic virtues, the creation of healthy families, the study of healthy work environments, and positive communities. Positive psychology may also be involved in investigations that look at how institutions can work better to support and nurture all of the citizens they impact. Therefore, in many ways positive psychology focuses on the scientific study of positive human functioning and flourishing on a number of levels, such as the biological, personal, relational, institutional, cultural and global (Compton, 2005).

Within the context of this study, positive individual traits from the individual level and positive psychology at the institutional level were the focus during the BOP 804 practicum. During the implementation of the practicum, the students of educational psychology were encouraged to focus on assessing (and mobilising during intervention) the learners' positive individual traits, as individual assets and to investigate how institutions within the learners' community could be used to support their learners and the members of their community at large.

Positive psychology also strives to bring positive prevention and positive therapy into the field of psychology. ***Positive therapy*** consists of instilling hope related and strength–building strategies and focuses on helping clients to assemble their strengths and resources for use in their everyday lives. ***Positive prevention*** concentrates on certain human strengths that have been found to act as buffers against mental illness: that is, courage, future-mindedness, optimism, interpersonal skill, faith, work ethic, hope, honesty, perseverance and the capacity for flow and insight. The task of prevention is to create a science of human strength whose mission will be to understand and learn how to foster those virtues in young people. Therefore, by identifying, amplifying and concentrating on the strengths in people at risk, positive psychology will do effective prevention. Practitioners need to recognize and amplify their client's strengths, rather than repair their weaknesses, and psychologists need to work with families, schools, communities and corporations to develop climates that foster those strengths. Practice that relies on the positive psychology worldview may have the direct effect of preventing many of the major emotional disorders. It may also have two side effects: making the lives of our clients physically healthier (given all we are learning about the effects of mental well-being on the body) and reorienting psychology to its neglected missions in making normal people stronger and more productive, as well as making high human potential actual (Snyder & Lopez, 2002).

2.2.2   AIMS AND TASKS OF THE PRACTICUM

The Career Assessment and Counselling (BOP 804) community engagement practicum has various aims, to enable the students to develop (Ebersöhn, 2009):

- As an educational-psychologist-in-training in terms of the scope of practice
- Acquire competencies synonymous with educational psychology practice in South Africa
- Experience diversity in educational psychology environments, reflect on diversity and make sense of diversity for practice
- To be ethical in their conduct and apply their knowledge of the 'Code of Conduct'
- Demonstrate the role of peer-supervisor
- To do research aligned with a dissertation of limited scope
- To be a reflective practitioner as educational-psychologist-in-training
- To interact professionally (includes interviewing skills) with clients (children, parents, as well as other significant people)
- To present an assessment professionally to the supervisor
- To act professionally at all times and with all staff responsible for practicum training
- To carry out educational psychology assessment and intervention in a diverse setting
- To find and utilise career knowledge in terms of recommendations,
- To identify therapeutic, intervention needs, as well as plan and implement therapy/intervention sessions
- To plan, implement and reflect on individual and group-based assessments
- To plan, implement and reflect on group-based therapy/intervention

- To practically apply, analyse, synthesize and evaluate acquired educational psychology knowledge and understanding of theory, especially in terms of positive psychology and the asset-based approach
- To integrate conclusions and insights during assessments with theoretical knowledge.

The main tasks during the practicum at the secondary school was (i) to informally assess the Grade 9 learners, to then compile an asset-map for career facilitation (and learning support) in terms of the school, as well as 'signature characteristics maps' for each learner. This was later used to (ii) implement planned group-based activities with those Grade 9 learners in terms of Educational Psychology intervention or therapy (Ebersöhn, 2007). Thus, students from the Department of Education Psychology of the University of Pretoria, each – during the first visit – documented individual asset maps of the learners, a narrative account for individual and environmental assets of each learner assessed and their barriers, which later formed the basis of their plan for the individual interventions with those Grade 9 learners. As such, the students applied several theoretical frameworks during their practicum (discussed later in this chapter). Theories that were emphasised in the module Career Assessment and Counselling (BOP 804) included the asset-based approach, positive psychology and several career theories. The theoretical foundations had its aim to assist clients to explore different career options and to investigate which assets could be mobilised to support clients in their career decision-making process and in learning support (Ebersöhn, 2007).

2.2.3 ASSESSMENT

The students were assessed according to their ability to draw on and employ several theoretical frameworks, as mentioned above. In addition, they were assessed on their ability to act as Educational-Psychologists-in-training in a new and different environment with diversity and language differences. Each student's ability to plan and facilitate the activities and subsequent reflection was also evaluated (Ebersöhn, 2007). A copy of the assessment sheet used by the supervisor during that practicum can be viewed in Appendix I.

2.2.4 SUPERVISION

Lecturers from the Department of Educational Psychology of the University of Pretoria facilitated the practicum at the secondary school. Prior to the two implementation phases each student discussed her planning for both the assessment and intervention phases of the project with the supervisor. The lecturers observed the students during their interactions with the Grade 9 learners and other significant people at the school. The lecturers guided the students during the assessment and intervention processes as well as the reflective dialogue, which was conducted away from the school after each session. In addition, the lecturers collected field notes and visual data during the practicum for research and assessment purposes. Debriefing and planning sessions were conducted with the students after the first visit to the school, to discuss their interventions in preparation for the second visit. For that purpose, the students were supervised as Educational-Psychologists-in-training (Ebersöhn, 2009).

2.3   COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: CONTEXTUAL AND CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

According to Bender (2008a), 'community engagement' is a term that is currently in flux and in fashion. She states, further, that the notion of community service within higher education in South Africa is not new and that in certain cases pre-existing practices, such as experiential education, community service, community development, community-based education, clinical practicals, community outreach and even service-learning have simply been renamed community engagement. As indicated in Chapter 1, since the publication of White Paper 3 (Department of Education, 1997) there has been a shift in the terminology used by stakeholders in national higher education, such as the Department of Education (DoE) and the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), from "community service" (Department of Education, 1997) and "academically based community service" (HEQC Founding Document, 2001) to "community engagement" including service-learning (HEQC Audit Criteria, 2004a; 2004b; 2004c, as cited in Bender, 2008a).

Currently, various volunteer and community outreach programmes exist in universities and higher education institutions (HEIs) within South Africa, such as the universities of: Free State (UFS), Pretoria (UP), Stellenbosch (SU), Cape Town (UCT), Rhodes (RU), KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Johannesburg (UJ), Western Cape (UWC) and Witwatersrand (WITS). Those, and other universities, understand the potential community engagement holds for transforming higher education in relation to societal needs, and for producing graduates with a sense of civic responsibility and an ability to apply the theory of their disciplines to local development issues (JET, 2006, as cited in Bender, 2008b). Although the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) and JET Education services published two groundbreaking books and produced a digital video disc, in 2006, with a view to assisting institutions of higher education to implement Service-Learning in South Africa (HEQC/JET, 2006a; 2006b, cited in Bender, 2008a), the content in those books are based on research done by American scholars and in the context of higher education in USA. However, as stated above, even though community engagement has many names, little research has as yet been done on the scholarship of engagement within South Africa (Bender, 2008a; Bender, 2007). Bender (2008b) further states that, within the South African context, there has been minimal observation of educational endeavours (such as community engagement activities and projects) or community engagement practices, and no studies on curricular community engagement practice. Therefore, there is still a gap between learning more about the experiences of students and close observation of individual and a group of students involved in community engagement practice. This research study on students' experiences of community engagement in an Educational Psychology practicum, aims to add to literature within South Africa on community engagement.

2.3.1   ENGAGEMENT

Society in general has called on institutions of higher education to display civic responsibility towards the societal issues of the day. In response to that call, a new vision for colleges and universities has been proposed – that of an 'engaged institution.' An engaged institution is committed to its students and faculty focusing on fulfilling its

traditional role of teaching and training students but, simultaneously, serving the surrounding communities and constituencies that support it (Ward, 2003; The Kellogg Commission, 1999).

According to Bender (2008b) 'engagement' is the partnership between the knowledge and resources of a university with those of the public, both service and private sectors, with the object of enriching scholarship, research and innovation; to enhance the curriculum, learning and teaching; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic (social) responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good (Bender, 2008b).

'Engagement' was articulated by Boyer (1990) as a way to demonstrate the broader role of higher education by integrating public purposes and benefits into teaching and research (Boyer calls those 'learning' and 'discovery') functions of higher education. At the present time and across the international literature, there is strong consensus that university-community engagement describes "*the collaboration between higher education institutions and their larger communities (local, regional/province, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity*" (Carnegie Foundation, 2009:1). That definition is widely adopted and emphasises the core elements that distinguish community engagement from non-scholarly forms of service, or the notion of 'outreach', which may be confused with engagement.

Traditionally, institutions of higher education have used a charity model when working with community partners, which focuses on the expert model, in which the relationship between the higher education institution and the community has been characterised by elitist, hierarchical, and undimensional, rather than collegial, participatory, cooperative, and democratic (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). Therefore, according to the Kellogg Commission (1999) developing better partnerships between the campus and the community is at the heart of renewing community engagement. Consequently, the case in this study (a practicum at a secondary school in Mpumalanga) moves away from a need-based approach to an asset-based approach, which implies the relationship and/or partnership between the campus and community would be defined by mutual respect. The partnership between community and institution of higher education would be characterized by problems that are defined together, common goals and agendas that are shared, definitions of success that are meaningful to both the university and the community and, finally, the utilization and leveraging of university, public and private resources. The focus is to create a partnership in which dignity is brought back to community by connecting its rich resources to vital social, civic and ethical problems (The Kellogg Commission, 1999; Bringle & Hatcher, 2002).

2.3.2   COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CURRICULAR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

As stated in chapter 1, The Quality Committee of the Council on Higher Education (Higher Education Quality Committee, 2004a:24), cited in Bender (2008b), provides the following definition of Community Engagement (CE), which is used as a basic reference in most institutions of higher education in South Africa. Community engagement can be defined as the initiatives and processes through which the expertise of the higher education

institution in the areas of teaching and research are applied to address issues relevant to its community. Community engagement finds expression in a variety of forms, which range from informal and relatively unstructured activities to formal and structured academic programmes addressed at particular community needs (service-learning programmes). Some projects might be conducive towards the creation of a better environment for community engagement and others might be directly related to teaching, learning and research (Higher Education Quality Committee, 2004a:24).

The above definition of community engagement does not attempt to constrain other definitions of engagement but seeks to acknowledge the full range of engagement activities undertaken by universities in South Africa. Therefore, a research university can reshape the definition and concept to fit that university's context, culture, and functions of scholarship (Bender, 2007).

Community engagement refers to the activities undertaken by universities that focus on developing and nurturing links with the community while benefiting both the university and the community. Community engagement activities can only be effective and sustainable if developed on a foundation of trust, mutual respect and understanding. It also requires the investment of energy by all parties involved. Community engagement is not about 'doing to' the community, but about engaging with and empowering the community. Inherent in the community engagement process is a collaborative process in which all community stakeholders are involved in both the initial and ongoing decision-making processes (Collins, Curtis, Curtis & Stevenson, 2007).

At the University of Pretoria, the concept of Curricular and Research Community Engagement is used as a framework for academic programmes and is regarded as a method of teaching and of research that requires knowledge-driven, mutually-beneficial partnerships with external entities, such that the university benefits from improved student learning and research quality and productivity, while the external community benefits from increased knowledge and capacity to address community issues (Bender, 2008a; Bender, 2008b).

Examples of curricular and research community engagement activities include:

- Community-based learning and academic service-learning: students learn academic content in and with the community, through partnership-designed activities that provide specific knowledge benefits to a particular community. This type of learning is curriculum-based and credit-bearing; it is fully integrated into a student's course of study.
- Community-based research: collaborative research in which university staff and community (along with the students) work together to design, conduct and report on research studies of both intellectual and community importance. Products of engaged research are of demonstrable benefit to both the academy and the community.
- Partnerships between the university and external organisations (business/government/community-based/non-profit/non-governmental (NGOs), educational, such as schools), focus on a mutually

designed agenda, to address specific community needs or opportunities through collaborative work, to which each partner contributes essential expertise (Bender, 2008a; Bender, 2008b).

2.3.4 DIFFERENT FORMS OF CURRICULAR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

There are several forms of curricular community engagement in higher education. Those different forms of engagement can be placed on a continuum between two important distinctions (adapted from Bender *et al*, 2006; Bender 2008b), namely:

▪ The primary *beneficiaries* of the service (i.e. community or student) and

▪ The primary *goal* of the service (i.e. community service or student learning).

The diagram below (figure 2.2) shows the different forms of curricular community engagement and places them on a continuum, as explained above.
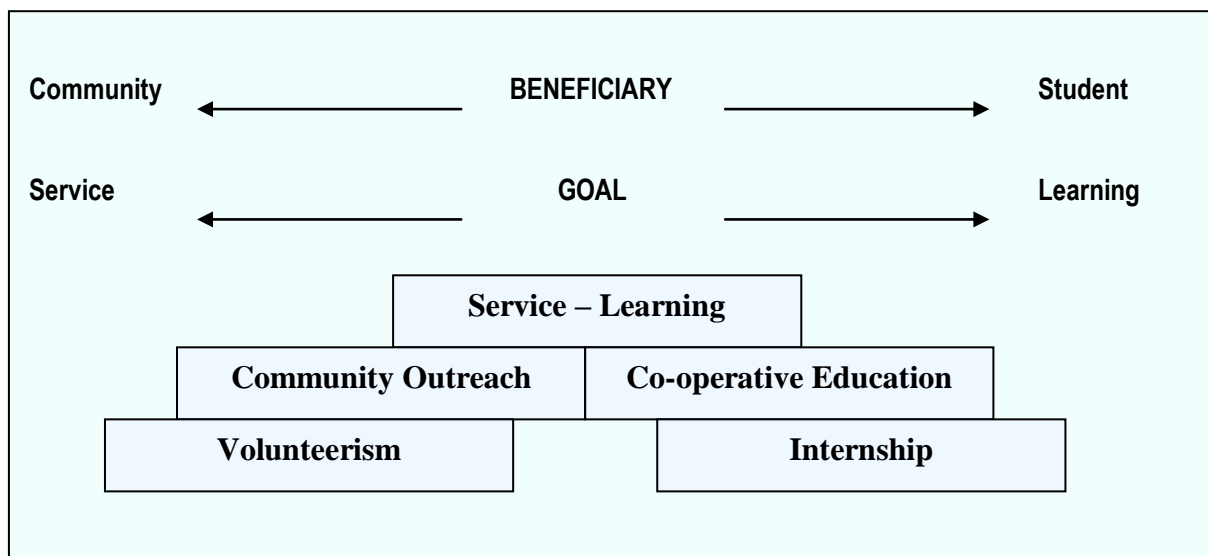
FIGURE 2.2: A CONTINUUM OF DIFFERENT FORMS OF CURRICULAR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT (ADAPTED FROM FURCO, 1996, CITED IN BENDER *ET AL*., 2006)

2.3.4.1 Volunteerism

Volunteerism is the engagement of students in activities where the primary beneficiary is the recipient community and the primary goal is to provide a *service* (Bender *et al*., 2006). Volunteer programmes are generally not related to, or integrated into, the student's field of study. Those programmes fall under extra-curricular activities, which take place during school holidays and outside tuition time. Students generally do not receive any academic credit for their volunteer work and the volunteer programmes are generally funded by external donors and student fundraising efforts and is, therefore, at the University of Pretoria not regarded as a form of curricular community engagement (Bender 2008b). Volunteer programmes are commonly small in scale and have a loose relationship

with higher educational institutions. However, volunteer programmes are essentially altruistic by nature, as it is designed to benefit the service recipient (Bender *et al.*, 2006; Naude, 2006).

2.3.4.2   Community outreach

'Community outreach' is an engagement of students in activities in which the primary beneficiary is the recipient community and the primary goal of community outreach is to provide a service (Bender *et al.*, 2006; Naude, 2006). Those programmes have more structure and require more commitment from the students. Community outreach programmes are generally initiated by a faculty or department in an institution of higher education. Unlike Volunteerism, those programmes give recognition through academic credit or research publications. Such a programme is closer to the centre of the continuum and more like service-learning, however, the latter is usually fully integrated into the curriculum (Naude, 2006).

2.3.4.3   Internship

According to Bender *et al.* (2006) internship programmes engage students in activities where the primary beneficiary is the student and the primary goal is to provide students with hands-on experience that enhances their learning and understanding of issues that are relevant to their field of study. Internship programmes aid students to achieve their learning outcomes and vocational experience by being fully integrated into the curriculum the student follows. Internships are used extensively in professional programmes, such as Educational Psychology (Naude, 2006).

2.3.4.4   Co-operative education

Bender *et al.* (2006) state that the primary beneficiaries in co-operative learning are the students and the primary goal is student learning. That programme provides students with co-curricular opportunities that are related to, but not always fully integrated with, the curriculum the student follows. As stated before, the primary goal of co-operative education is to enhance the student's understanding of their field of study and the desired outcome is enhanced student learning.

2.3.4.5   Service-learning

Service-learning engages students in actives where both the community and student are simultaneous primary beneficiaries. The primary goals are to provide a service to the community and, at the same time to enhance, a student's learning through rendering that very service. That form of community engagement is underpinned by reciprocity in which the service is enriched through scholarly activity, particularly student learning, and enriched through service to the community (Bender *et al.*, 2006; Naude, 2006).

Service-learning has four essential criteria: Firstly, the service being provided must be relevant and meaningful to the community, students and the learning institution. Hence, the service must be relevant in improving the quality of life for the community, as well as assist students to achieve module outcomes. Secondly, service learning experiences must strengthen the accomplishment of learning outcomes and complement learning resources. Student learning must take place during activities, experiences, learning strategies and assessment. Thirdly, purposeful civic learning must occur in which learning contributes to the preparation of students for active civic participation (active involvement in communities of the future) and, therefore, social responsibility. Finally, students need to be given structured opportunities to reflect. Reflection assists in gaining a deeper understanding of module content, a broader application of the discipline and enhanced personal values and social responsibility (Bender *et al*., 2006).

In conclusion, Naude (2006) states that the following forms of community engagement, volunteerism and community outreach emphasise community service; whereas, internships and co-operative education emphasise student learning. Service-learning reflects a more balanced approach, as it is an integration of both community service and student learning.

2.4 LEARNING STRATEGIES RELEVANT TO CURRICULAR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRACTICE

Experiential learning and reflective learning are types of learning integrated in community engagement activities that form part of the module Career Assessment and Counselling (BOP 804). Those two types of learning will be discussed in depth. Kolb's theory of experiential learning will be explained, which will form the theoretical framework to understanding the data gathered through this research effort.

2.4.1 EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Paradigm shifts have occurred in institutions of higher education in which classroom contexts are giving way to practices that are more experiential and collaborative. Experiential learning shifts the onus from learning from the instructor, as the sole source of knowledge, to students, who then become partners in the learning process, and experiences beyond the classroom, for what such experiences can add to student learning. The shift in teaching and learning paradigms points toward more opportunities for students to engage in different forms of community engagement. The main shift has been that of experiential learning. The fundamental principle of experiential learning is that an individual learns best by doing something (Ward, 2003). One of the greatest educational theorists who advocated experiential learning was John Dewey, who was opposed to the traditional educational system, in which learners were passive recipients of knowledge. Dewey viewed the role of the student in traditional education to be submissive, compliant and receptive (Dewey, 1938). Dewey (1938), therefore, emphasised the importance of hands-on education and argued that all educational activities should involve the learner, through active participation, in experiences linked to the knowledge that is to be acquired (McElhaney, 1998; Bender *et al*., 2006).

2.4.1.1 Propositions of experiential learning

Kolb and Kolb (2005) state that the theory of experiential learning is based on six propositions. The first proposition states that experiential learning emphasises that to improve learning, the primary focus should be on engaging students in a process that best enhances their learning. That process should include feedback on the effectiveness of their learning efforts and should also include a process by which the learner is involved in different experiences, namely, concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active participation. Learners who engage in such a process achieve new knowledge, skills and attitudes (Benecke, 2004). Secondly, experiential learning is facilitated best when the process draws out the beliefs and ideas of the student about a topic, to be examined, tested, and integrated with new, more refined ideas. Thirdly, learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world. Conflict, differences, and disagreement are what drive the learning process. In the process of learning, one is called upon to move back and forth between opposing modes of reflection and action, feeling, and thinking. Fourthly, learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world. Not just the result of cognition, learning involves the integrated functioning of the total person-thinking, feeling, perceiving, and behaving. The fifth characteristic, states that learning results from synergetic transactions between the person and the environment. In Piaget's terms, learning occurs through equilibration of the dialectic processes of assimilating new experiences into existing concepts and accommodating existing concepts to new experience. Finally, learning is the process of creating knowledge. Experiential learning theory proposes a constructivist theory of learning, whereby social knowledge is created and recreated in the personal knowledge of the learner. This stands in contrast to the "transmission" model on which much educational practice is currently based, where pre-existing fixed ideas are transmitted to the learner (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

In summary, experiential learning includes the active involvement of the learner in their environment. The importance of reflection on activities both during and after an experiential learning activity or experience is emphasised. The context and environment in which the experiential learning activity occurs plays a significant role in the learner's experience (Benecke, 2004). Kolb's theory is recognised as underpinning the concept of community engagement, as it recognises that experience is important for enhancing learning. Experiential learning affirms the importance of experiential activities and techniques, such as practicum, internships, service-learning, on-the-job training and work-based learning. Experiential activities are creative and varied and the application thereof will depend on a number of variables, such as the support structures available within higher education (Benecke, 2004).

2.4.1.2 Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning

Learning, defined from an experiential learning perspective, is understood to be, "*the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience*" (Kolb, 1984:38). Therefore, the effectiveness of such learning depends on the student's

ability to learn from the experience (Le Roux, 2007). Experiential learning provides a holistic model of the learning process, as it helps individuals to learn, grow and develop (Kolb, Baker & Jensen, 2002). The experiential learning model of Kolb (1984) portrays two dialectically related modes of grasping experience, namely, apprehension (concrete experience) and comprehension (abstract conceptualization) and two dialectically related modes of transforming experience, namely, intension (reflective observation) and extension (active experimentation). Experiential learning is a process of constructing knowledge that involves a creative tension among the four learning modes that is responsive to contextual demands. This process of constructing knowledge is portrayed as an idealised learning cycle where the learner comes into contact with all the bases, namely, experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting, in a recursive process (see Figure 2.3) that is responsive to the learning situation and what is being learned (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Kolb *et al*., 2002). *Concrete experiences* entails direct practical experience, thus the learner actively experiences an activity. *Reflective observation* focuses on the learner consciously reflecting back on the experience. It requires the individual to observe, examine, analyse and interpret the impact of a specific concrete experience. *Abstract conceptualization* gives meaning to discoveries by relating them to other discoveries and other forms of knowledge. This usually results in the learner trying to conceptualise a theory or model of what is being observed. Finally*, active experimentation* is when the learner plans how to test a theory or model for a forthcoming experience. Learning in this cycle (see Figure 2.3) is flexible, as learning can begin at any stage of the cycle (Healey & Jenkins, 2000; Bender *et al*., 2006). Kolb's experiential learning cycle can be used as a framework for community engagement in higher institutions, to aid them in their practical work in the community.
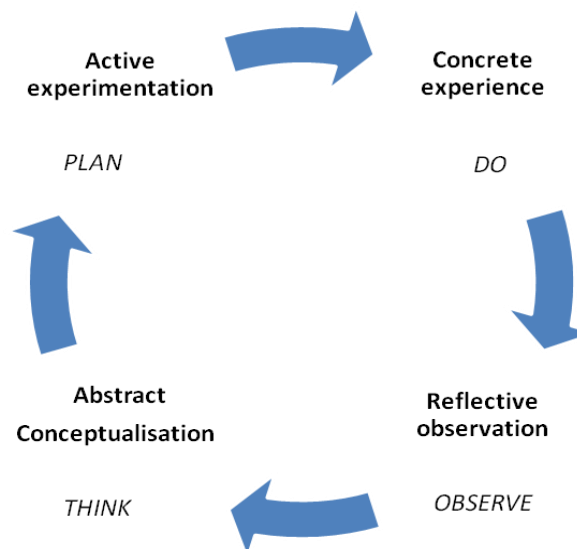
FIGURE 2.3: SCHEMATIC PRESENTATION OF KOLB'S (1984) EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE (BROCKBANK & MCGILL, 2006:33)

For the purpose of this study Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning will be used as the theoretical framework to understanding the data that is collected and in understanding the answers obtained during the focus group interview of the experience of students of an Educational Psychology community engagement practicum.

2.4.2   REFLECTIVE LEARNING

As stated in Chapter 1, Brockbank, McGill and Beech (2002) not only describe what reflection is but how to achieve it. According to them, reflective learning is an intentional process whereby the social context and experience of the learner are acknowledged. Learners are active individuals, wholly present, engaging with one another, open to challenge, and the outcome involves transformation as well as improvement for both individuals and their profession.

Careful reflection is integral to the success of learning. Without reflection, the individual has a set of experiences that are unconnected and ineffective in changing how he or she learns about the world. However, reflection is not an inherent skill, and has to be taught in order for it to be effective and not stay on a superficial level. It appears that many individuals do not reflect spontaneously on their learning and, therefore, the skills required for reflection must be taught. Supervisors should not necessarily teach how to reflect, but instead must facilitate the reflection process by developing a thoughtful context in which individuals can extract meaning from their experiences. The use of techniques, such as maintaining a reflective journal, can help individuals sort information into recognisable patterns and make connections between past experience and current learning (Sugerman, Doherty, Garvey & Gass, 2000; Dunbar-Krige, 2006). In conclusion, individuals who reflect on an experience are better able to extract lessons from the experience, to understand themselves in relation to the experience and to then apply the learning to other areas of their lives (Sugerman *et al.*, 2000).

2.4.2.1   Theories of reflection

The work of Schön is central to my understanding of 'reflection' as he helps professionals to explore the fundamental nature of their work with clients within reflective practicum. Schön's writings in *The Reflective Practitioner* (Schön, 1983) and its companion volume, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (Schön, 1987) had such relevance for a variety of professionals, who recognised his work as a way to address the chronically difficult vacuum that presently exists between theory and practice. At the foundation of his work lies the argument that an alternative method of appreciating and fostering practice competencies is needed and that such a method should be based on the notion of reflection and reflective practice (Redmond, 2004:31). Schön refers to two main processes of reflection in professional practice, that of reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. The former is used to convey reflective interaction between action, thinking and being, while the latter suggests an immediacy inherent in reflection and action. This is particularly apposite in relation to reflection-in-action where the professional may well be "thinking on her feet," as we may say (Brockbank & McGill, 2007; Moon, 2000).

TABLE **2.1:**   **R**EFLECTION-ON-ACTION AND REFLECTION-IN-ACTION (B**ROCKBANK** & M**CGILL**, 2006:247)

REFLECTION-ON-ACTION	REFLECTION-IN-ACTION
1. Planned intervention to support learning from experience.	1. Spontaneous reflection that occurs as a result of a need to understand and respond to experience.
2. The learner is supported by the educator.	2. Learners organise reflection themselves.
3. Reflection is planned for specific times.	3. Reflection occurs at any time, but usually when understanding of the circumstances is necessary and when time is available.
4. Reflection usually occurs when the learners are away from the immediate workplace.	4. Reflection usually occurs in the workplace.
5. It involves contemplation.	5. Reflection is an active process.

▪   **Reflection-in-action**

Reflection-in-action is distinguished by other forms of reflection because of its immediate significance for action. This form of reflection requires reflecting while the action is happening, a kind of checking function, and if there is to be any modification arising from the reflection-in-action, adjustment will take place to resume normal service (Brockbank & McGill, 2007).

▪   **Reflection-on-action**

Reflection-on-action is significant in the process of engaging in critical reflection. Reflection-on-action is when the reflective practitioner reflects upon their action, in reflection-in-action. That involves thinking about previous personal experiences, analysing them and then developing personal theories of action (Brockbank & McGill, 2007; Beard & Wilson, 2006). Reflection-in-action is within the action of the person engaged in the action and therefore, forming an essential part of the action. Reflection-on-action can be undertaken by the person independently after the action. This personal reflection-on-action is important in the continuing internal dialogue about their practice and may influence their future action and reflection-in-action. However, while this form of reflection is necessary and desirable it is not necessarily sufficient. Reflection-on-action with others in dialogue, which encourages critical reflection about the actions a person has undertaken will be more likely to be effective in promoting reflective learning. Reflective dialogue or reflection-with-another is distinguished from internal dialogue, where reflection is limited to the insights of the individual. The detachment of self required to look critically at the self is difficult to achieve, and could lead to self-deception. Individualistic learning isolates learners and leaves them to their own view of the world, a view that is mediated by personal biography and social and economic forces; these give rise to assumptions, beliefs, perceptions and ways of construing and acting on experience. Therefore, the learner's assumptions and beliefs tend to remain untouched by internal dialogue but may be challenged by reflective dialogue with another, through connected learning (Brockbank & McGill, 2007; Brockbank & McGill, 2006).

▪ **Single and double loop learning**

'Single loop learning' and 'double loop learning' is used to distinguish between learning for improving the way things are done and learning that transforms the situation. Single loop learning, involves planning the action, undertaking it, evaluating it and finally learning from the previous experiences. Whilst it achieves immediate improvement, this form of learning leaves underlying values and ways of seeing things unchanged. Double loop learning is learning, where assumptions about ways of seeing things are challenged and underlying values are changed. Double loop learning, has the potential to bring about a profound shift in underlying values by cracking the learner's paradigm or ways of seeing the world. In order to see how ideas differ from ours, it is necessary to leap out from our shell of absolute certainty and construct a completely new world based on some other person's ideas of reality, or other assumptions of truth. Single loop learning or day-to-day maintenance learning for improvement, meeting goals and altering practice on the basis of experience, enables progress to be made (Brockbank & McGill, 2007 ; Brockbank *et al.*, 2002).

2.4.2.2 Indicators of reflective learning

Brockbank *et al*. (2002) provides indicators on how learning can be made reflective. The first indicator states that reflective learning is active rather than passive. The importance of doing and action is important for learners where tangible outcomes are sought from learning. Secondly, learners need to use their experience for learning. This enables the learners to place what they are learning within the context of their work, whilst recognising their life experience. For many individuals the realities of race, gender and class issues are a day-to-day pressure. Reflective learning includes all such experiences as significant material for learning and offers space and place for acknowledging and contextualising experience. Thirdly, learners should construct their own learning within a social context. The idea of a socially constructed world, where individuals contribute to their experienced reality and meaning is created in relation to others, can be recognised in reflective learning. Fourthly, reflective learning is holistic. It takes into consideration, the learner's cognitive, physical and emotional experiences. And that includes the learner's experience, whether familial, personal, or practical. Fifthly, *reflective* learning enriches knowledge. For deep and effective learning to occur, new knowledge needs to be processed and made sense of within a reflective process, and reflective learning provides that. Finally, reflective learning uses dialogue. Self-reflection is a private, confidential affair that is conducted internally. However, reflection with others offers the power of the challenge and different perspectives for the learner, and ultimately the potential for double-loop learning (Brockbank *et al*., 2002).

2.4.2.3 Reflective journals

Different methods are employed for reflection, such as writing, journals, portfolios and notebooks, collages and audio cassette players. However, for the purpose of this research, the focus will be on reflective journals. As previously mentioned, as Educational-Psychologists-in-training, the students who participated in this study had to demonstrate their ability to be a reflective practitioner. Thus, as part of the studies toward the BOP 804 module, the students were required to reflect in their 'reflective journal' at the close of each day of the practicum

(Ebersöhn, 2007). Reflective journals (learning journals) are used as vehicles for reflection in educational situations (Moon, 2003). Reflective journals are written over a period of time, not 'in one go'. The notion of learning implies that there is an overall intention by the writer (or those who have set the task) that learning should be enhanced (Moon, 2003). Below are examples of several ways that reflective journals enhance the learning of students.

2.4.2.4   Learning from reflective journals

Moon (2003) states several ways that learning may occur when one uses a reflective journal. Firstly, journal writing is a process that accentuates favourable conditions for learning. For example, it produces an intellectual space in which students can think and encourages independent learning. Secondly, journal writing encourages reflection, which is associated with deep learning. In deep learning, the intention of the learner is to develop a personal understanding of the material and to relate it to what is already known. Thirdly, writing in a journal encourages metacognition, and the learning of those with a metacognitive view of their functioning is generally better. Lastly, the act of writing is associated with learning or the enhancement of learning. People use expressive language in journals, a language more like conversation than most other forms of writing and, possibly, more like the language of thought. We may be able to learn better from this form of language than the formal academic language into which we are inducted in more advanced forms of education.

In conclusion, professionals have become essential to the functioning of society. Individuals, in different ways, are dependent upon professionals and because of that, professionals on the whole, are valued and revered in varying degrees by society. Therefore, by being in a creative, stimulating and reflective environment, the professional is provided with the means to grow in understanding and awareness not just for themselves, but also the individuals with whom they work (Redmond, 2004).

2.5   STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF SERVICE-LEARNING ACTIVITIES

In this section the experience of the students of service-learning activities will be discussed. The reason for deciding to focus on this topic is the limited sources of literature currently available that describe the experiences of students in other forms of curricular community engagement activities.

2.5.1   CONCEPTUALISING EXPERIENCE

Qualitative inquiry deals with human lived experience. That refers to the individual's **lifeworld** as it is lived, felt, undergone, made sense of, and accomplished by human beings that is the object of study (Schwandt, 2007). Schwandt (2007) discusses *Erfahrung,* which refers to experiences as something one undergoes, so that subjectivity of meaning is drawn into an 'event.' Experience is, therefore, understood as integrative, unfolding, dynamic, and, hence, singular.

As stated in Chapter 1, Beard and Wilson (2006:16) highlight the Oxford Dictionary's definition of experience as, '*The fact of being consciously the subject of a state or condition; of being consciously affected by an event; a state or condition viewed subjectively; an event by which one is affected; and, knowledge resulting from actual observation or from what one has undergone.*' This definition provides an initial starting point, yet John Dewey wrote extensively on the subject of experience. Dewey (1938) asserts that experience is a linking process between action and thought. Dewey discusses the nature of the experience emphasising that it not just any experience that holds the potential for learning; it is in Dewey's terms the 'quality' of the experience that provides a measure of its educational significance. Quality is described by Dewey as a union of the 'continuity', which he describes as the bringing together of the before and after of the experience on events and the 'interaction' of the internal and external factors of the experience. Thus, experience is not just a simple matter of exposure to an event; there is an element of the experience needing to become internalised and positioned in relation to existing knowledge and experiences. Dewey (1938) further stated that 'experience plus reflection equals learning'. Therefore, for experiential learning to occur, reflection upon experience is significant to overall learning. This suggests that reflecting on an experience creates a meaningful encounter and not just an observation, not a passive undergoing of something but an active engagement with the environment, of which the learner is an important part (Sugerman *et al*., 2000; Fowler, 2008; Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993).

During the practicum, the students were encouraged to reflect individually through their reflective journals and through reflective dialogue with their colleagues and educators. By doing so, it is assumed that the experiences of those students led them to new insights and new learning (Beard & Wilson, 2006).

2.5.2 STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF SERVICE-LEARNING

The current literature on the topic focuses mainly on service-learning, which is a community engagement activity. Service-learning is defined by Bringle and Hatcher (1996:222) as a credit-bearing educational experience, in which students participate in an organised service activity that meets identified community goals. In addition, the students are required to reflect on the activity so as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. Furthermore, the current literature focuses mainly on the impact of service-learning experiences on students and not specifically the experiences of those same students; and, further, the focus is also only on certain health professions, such as social workers, educators, and nurses. There is, however, a gap in literature on how Educational Psychologists experience community engagement activities. Previous studies revealed that service-learning had the following impact on students:

2.5.2.1 An increased awareness and understanding of diversity

Studies have shown that the experience of the service-learning activity combined with the knowledge in their academic course material had challenged many of the stereotyped thoughts and prejudices the students had and made them more open in considering the life experiences of the people they encountered. Therefore, students

felt that they had developed a deeper appreciation for people who are from diverse backgrounds and had cultivated skills that enabled them to relate personally to others (McKenna & Rizzo, 1999; Gardner & Baron, 1999; Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda & Yee, 2000; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Simons & Cleary, 2006; Harwood, Fliss & Gaulding, 2006; Boyle-Baise & Kilbane, 2000; Driscoll, Holland, Gelmon & Kerrigan, 1996; Hesser, 1995).

Although Steinke, Fitch, Johnson, and Waldstein, (2002) reiterate the above; they also acknowledge that it is not enough for students to be introduced to diversity without working through their initial feelings and assumptions. They state that, if the students are not adequately prepared for working with the community, service-learning experiences may actually reinforce stereotyping. Therefore, students should be helped to process and learn from their service-learning experiences in multicultural settings by using reflective methods. Reflection is also related to greater intellectual development, as students are encouraged to take on multiple perspectives and are more open to alternative perspectives and more complex ways of reasoning about course content, social issues, and beliefs (Henry, 2005).

2.5.2.2 Academic development

In a study by Astin *et al.* (2000), focusing on how service-learning affects students, students felt that service-learning provides them with a sense of reality about what is going on in the world around them, and heightens their awareness of the issues being studied. Students felt that by applying their course material to "real world" situations, it motivates them to become involved in finding a solution to some of the problems they encounter. Other students also felt that they learnt the course material in greater depth because they were able to relate what they were learning and experiencing at the service-learning site to what they were learning in class. Some students also felt that it stimulated thoughts and discussions and increased their knowledge in general (Astin & Sax, 1998; Harwood *et al.*, 2006; Blackwell, 1996; Cohen & Kinsey, 1994; Driscoll *et al.*, 1996).

Gardner and Baron (1999) assert that the greatest strength of service-learning activities is that it helps students to place classroom material into a meaningful context. Service-learning has the ability to help students integrate theory and practice, and to allow students to become more active participants in the learning process. Additionally, service-learning is a powerful tool that enables students to learn to assess problems and needs and develop solutions within the community (McKenna & Rizzo, 1999).

In addition, students felt that the service-learning experience enhanced their sense of responsibility for their own learning, as they realised that they are accountable to someone else in their service site or as they endeavour to provide "good service" to others (McKenna & Rizzo, 1999).

2.5.2.3 Increased personal growth

Students experienced greater learning about themselves because of the service-learning experience. Students experienced increased self-understanding, as well as greater awareness of their strengths and weaknesses and

an increased ability to adapt to challenges. Students also experienced an enhanced self-esteem, self-efficacy and confidence in their own abilities and skills (McKenna & Rizzo, 1999; Harwood *et al*., 2006; Driscoll *et al*., 1996; Bender *et al*., 2006). In addition, the students became more aware of their own sense of privilege during the community engagement activity (Henry, 2005).

2.5.2.4 Career outcomes and engaging in future community engagement activities

Students who participated in a community engagement activity later planned to pursue a service-related career and planned to partake in future community engagement activities (Astin *et al*., 2000).

2.5.2.5 Civic responsibility and social responsibility

Students experienced a need to develop civic skills so as to engage with citizens and to promote a civil society and to build the commonwealth (Fall, 2004). The students felt that getting directly involved in the application of the course material helps them to develop a sense of civic responsibility. Similarly, students felt that the service-learning experience leads to an increased awareness of community and societal issues and a greater willingness to work towards the resolution of societal problems (Hughes, 2002; Astin *et al*., 2000; Bender *et al*., 2006).

2.5.2.6 The importance of reflection in a community engagement activity

In the study by Austin *et al.* (2000), students indicated that reflection is an important element of service-learning courses. Students felt that reflection enabled them to synthesise the knowledge gained from the experience outside the classroom and the book knowledge they learned inside the classroom. Students also gained a better understanding of how to ask questions about the readings for the course and stated that reflection aided them to critically analyse the readings and other information that was being presented to them in the course, as well as in their service-learning experiences.

The students in the above research study described engaging primarily in two types of reflection activities, namely class discussions that were facilitated by their course professors, and written reflection, which took the form of journals and papers. Students experienced both types of reflection activities as positive because they felt that they increased their learning, as they were learning not only from their own service experiences but also from those of others; that writing in journals was helpful because it required them to think formally about connecting the course material to the service experience. In addition, students felt that both reflective methods resulted in emotional and personal growth, as reflection challenged their own thoughts and belief systems (Astin *et al*., 2000).

The findings of this study reinforce the important role that reflection plays in enhancing learning, by connecting the course material to the service experience. Reflection provides "the transformative link between the action of serving and the ideas and understanding of learning" (Eyler, Giles & Schmiede, 1996:14). However, it is

especially important that educators understand the importance of including a reflection component in their service-learning courses. Merely adding a reflection component, such as journal writing, might not be enough. More specifically, it is the opportunity to engage in a dialogue about the service experience, especially with other students, which seems to make a difference. In short, it is important for educators to incorporate thoughtful discussions and reflections into their courses (Astin *et al*., 2000).

In conclusion, findings from the different studies reveal that the students involved in service-learning experience diverse outcomes, such as: academic benefit, civic responsibility, personal efficacy, civic mindedness and community building, appreciation for diversity of individuals and the importance of reflection in service-learning (Hughes, 2002).

2.5.3   THE ROLE OF REFLECTION ON EXPERIENCE

Benecke (2004) states that learners must be given the opportunity to create meaning from their experiences, for those experiences to then lead to effective experiential learning. Boud *et al*. (1993) developed a model that focuses on the place and contribution of reflection in the learning process. The model takes into consideration the experiences of the learner, the intended outcomes of reflection, as well as the individual and emotional processes involved in reflection (Harrison, Short & Roberts, 2003). The essence of the model involves three key factors in reflecting on experience. The first factor focuses on returning to the experience in which the learner recalls the experience in a descriptive way, without judging or evaluating it. The second factor is the analysis of the feelings that arose within the learner during that experience. Obstructive feelings experienced during the event need to be analysed and dealt with, so that reflection could take place constructively, and supportive feelings need to be fostered, to assist the process of reflection. Finally, the third factor deals with re-evaluating the experience by means of linking the experience to past experiences, to integrate the experience into current and existing experiences as well as testing the new experience and adopting new actions or experiences (Boud *et al*., 1993).

In addition, reflection does not only take place after an experience but also during the experience. The learner's own intentions and personal foundation play a role in how the experience will be interpreted and in the way that the reflection will be done. It is important that the learner needs to prepare for the experience and that the supervisor creates a supportive environment, so that the reflection process may be effective (Boud *et al*., 1993; Benecke, 2004).

Barriers to the learning experience can inhibit the different stages of our learning process and, therefore, need to be identified. Barriers may either be external or internal. Internal barriers stem from the unique personal experiences of a learner, such as previous negative experiences, lack of awareness of one's assumptions, the emotional state of the learner and established patterns of behaviour. External barriers stem from other people, the learning environment and social factors such as stereotyping and classification. According to Boud *et al*. (1993), certain strategies can be implemented to identify and address barriers, so as to facilitate effective learning

and a successful experience. Those interventions may include: creating a situation of sharing experiences, asking fellow learners to give feedback to the learner, barriers in a learning experience can be limited by acknowledging their existence, explaining the functioning of the identified barriers by looking at their origin, and managing the barriers by re-visiting the past experiences and re-evaluating them against the present situation (Boud *et al*., 1993; Benecke, 2004).

Sugerman *et al*. (2000) highlight that John Dewey understood that careful selection of experiences, linked with commitment to reflection upon these experiences, formed the basis of acquisition of new knowledge and learning. In conclusion, reflection is integral to the success of learning. Take away reflection and the learner has a series of experiences that are unconnected and ineffective in changing how he or she learns about the world. However, many individuals do not appear to reflect spontaneously on their learning and it is therefore imperative that skills required for reflection are taught and that educators facilitate the reflection process. This is done by the facilitator enhancing reflection and providing catalysts for learning, by developing a thoughtful context in which individuals can extract meaning from their experiences (Sugerman *et al*., 2000).

2.5.4 THEORETICAL INDICATORS OF EXPERIENCE IN LEARNING

Based on the literature already discussed on the concept of experiences and the theories of experiential learning and reflective learning, as researcher I propose that the five propositions made by Boud *et al*. (1993), which are discussed below, that regard learning from experience be used as theoretical indicators of 'experience,' to ensure my correct understanding of the data contained in Chapter 4 of this study.

As stated above, Boud *et al*. (1993) discuss five propositions about learning from experience. The first proposition states that *experience is the foundation of, and the stimulus for learning*. This shows that learning in isolation from experience is meaningless, as learning builds on and flows from learning. The effects of experience influence all learning, for example, earlier experiences, whether positive or negative, stimulate or suppress new learning. Those experiences either encourage us to take risks and enter into new territory for exploration or, alternatively, inhibit our range of operation or ability to respond to opportunities. However, while experience may be the foundation of learning, it does not necessarily lead to it. There needs to be active engagement with it and the individual needs to reflect on it, to draw drawing meaning from it. Reflection helps to link new experiences with those of the past, to provide new meanings and to stimulate us to explore those parts of our world which we have previously avoided.

The second proposition states that *learners actively construct their experience.* As individuals we attach meaning to our experiences; therefore, we define and construct our own experiences. This is the result of the learner bringing to an event their own expectations, knowledge, attitudes and emotions; these influence their interpretation of the experience and their own construction of what they experience (Boud *et al*., 1993).

The third proposition emphasises that ***learning is a holistic process.*** The individual is seen in totality, therefore, during an event the different aspects such as the individual's cognitive domain (concerned with thinking), the affective domain (concerned with values and feelings) and the psychomotor domain (concerned with action and doing) should be taken into account, as learning involves the interaction of all domains (Boud *et al.*, 1993).

The fourth proposition focuses on ***learning as socially and culturally constructed***. As learners do not exist independently from their environments, when they construct their own experiences they do so in the context of a particular social setting and a range of cultural values and, therefore, critical reflection is required to examine the influence of their values and culture on their experiences. Therefore, learning does not occur in isolation from social and cultural norms and values (Boud *et al.*, 1993).

Finally, the fifth proposition states that ***learning is influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it occurs***. Our society and educational institutions have predominantly neglected the importance of emotions and feelings. Emotions and feelings are key pointers to both possibilities for, and barriers, to learning. Acknowledging them can enable us to significantly redirect our attention towards matters, which we have previously neglected. The way in which we interpret experience is ultimately linked with how we view ourselves. It is important that learners develop confidence and build self-esteem, as these are necessary elements to learning from experience. As individuals, if we do not have confidence in what we see and feel, then we cannot make use of the information that we garner from the world that surrounds us. A belief in our ability to act and learn is a prerequisite for learning; without this we are merely passive participants in the constructs of others (Boud *et al.*, 1993).

2.6   CONCLUSION

As the application of community engagement activities become more widely established on university campuses across the globe, faculty and administration are keenly interested in outcomes assessment and evidence of the impact of community engagement experiences (McKenna & Rizzo, 1999). Despite the growing body of literature on community engagement, there remains a need for further research that examines how university students experience community engagement activities. Previous research has focused mainly on service-learning and the impact of service-learning on students. Currently there is limited relevant literature that covers the topic of student experiences of other types of community engagement activities such as, practicum and internships. In addition to that, the literature has also been limited to certain professions, such as doctors, social workers and educators, and how they experience service-learning. There is a need, therefore for the literature on the topic to be expanded, to include the experiences of other professionals, such as Educational Psychologists. There is also a need to focus on literature within the South African context, as the relevant literature currently available focuses on studies conducted in other countries. This research study, therefore, focuses on MEd Educational Psychology students in South Africa and their experiences of a community engagement practicum, in order to fill the gap in the current literature within this country.

In this chapter, I situated my research project within the framework of the existing literature, by, initially, discussing community engagement and the different forms of curricular community engagement. Experiential learning and reflective learning as the conceptual framework of this research study was discussed, as was the current literature on the experiences of students in community engagement activities.

In Chapter 3 the methodological choices made within the context of this study are described and explained in terms of the research questions contained in Chapter 1.

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CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

MY PURPOSE OF THE STUDY → To explore and describe students' experiences of community engagement in an Educational Psychology practicum

MY PARADIGMATIC APPROACH → Interpretivism

MY APPROACH → A qualitative methodological approach

MY RESEARCH DESIGN → Case study – instrumental case design

MY SELECTED PARTICIPANTS → Masters Educational Psychology students who participated in the Educational Psychology community engagement practicum

MY DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES → Focus groups, reflective journals and visual data

MY DATA DOCUMENTATION →
- Field notes taken during the focus group sessions
- Focus groups were audio taped and later transcribed
- Reflective journals and photographs from the practicum.

MY DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION METHOD → Thematic analysis

MY CONSIDERATIONS →
- Ethical principles
- Insider-outsider perspective
- Qualitative criteria

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 2 the MEd Educational Psychology practicum was discussed and the existing literature on community engagement and the different forms of curricular community engagement, as well as the learning strategies relevant to community engagement practice, namely experiential and reflective learning, were explored.

In Chapter 3 the selected paradigmatic perspective and research design, as well as the research methodology, data analysis and interpretation procedures that were employed to conduct the study will be discussed. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the ethical strategies and quality criteria that were followed in undertaking this study.

3.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study is, by nature, explorative and descriptive. I wanted to explore and describe students' experiences of community engagement in an Educational Psychology practicum, a relatively new subject of study (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). By utilizing a descriptive method of study the in-depth description of the experiences of the group of students who participated in this study could be emphasised. This study also had an exploratory purpose, as I intended to break new ground, leading to fresh insights and comprehension into the topic of research. However, a shortcoming of exploratory studies is that they seldom provide satisfactory answers to research questions, although they can hint at the answers and can suggest research methods that could provide definitive answers. The reason exploratory studies are seldom definitive in themselves has to do with representativeness, which means that the individuals in this exploratory research may not be typical of the larger population (Babbie, 2005; Babbie & Mouton, 2001). However, it was not the purpose of this study to generalise the findings (Seale, 2000).

McMillan and Schumacher (2001) assert research studies that are descriptive and exploratory by nature add to the literature by building rich descriptions of complex situations and give direction for future research. The exploratory and descriptive purposes of this study were to gain new insights with regard to the experiences of students of Educational Psychology in a community engagement practicum. As a result, by presenting rich descriptions of such experiences, it may contribute to both the literature of curricular community engagement and Educational Psychology theory and practice.

3.3 PARADIGMATIC APPROACH

A paradigm is a set of beliefs and interrelated assumptions about the social world, which provides a philosophical and conceptual framework that guides the organised study of that world (Creswell, 2007). That implies that paradigms serve as the lens or organising principles by which reality is interpreted. The selected paradigm guides the researcher in philosophical assumptions about the research and in the selection of tools, instruments, methods to use in the research study. The paradigm that informed this qualitative research and shaped the practice of this research is the interpretevist approach (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Ponterotto, 2005;

Nieuwenhuis, 2007a). In the following section, the selected epistemological and methodological paradigms are discussed.

3.3.1   AN INTERPRETIVIST EPISTEMOLOGY

As stated in Chapter 1, this research was conducted from an interpretevist paradigmatic viewpoint. Therefore, the goal was to understand the "*lived experiences*" (Erlebnis) from the point of view of those who live it (the participants) from day to day. Those "lived experiences" occur within a historical social reality. Furthermore, those "lived experiences" may be outside the immediate awareness of the individual but could be brought to consciousness through deep reflection. The interactive researcher-participant dialogue can stimulate this reflection, thus only through such interaction can "lived experiences" and deeper meaning be uncovered. The researcher and the participants jointly create (co-construct) findings from the interactive dialogue and interpretation (Ponterotto, 2005).

Nieuwenhuis (2007a) states that the interpretivist perspective is based on the following assumptions, which were taken into consideration during my research process. The first assumption states that ***human life can only be understood from within*** and not from some external reality. Therefore, interpretivism focuses on people's subjective experiences, how they "construct" the social world by sharing meanings, and how they interact with or relate to each other. The second assumption describes ***social life as being distinctively a human product*** that assumes that reality is not objectively determined but is socially constructed. The uniqueness of a particular context is important in understanding and interpreting the meanings constructed by the individuals. The third assumption states that ***the human mind is the main source or origin of meaning***. Therefore, by exploring the richness, depth and complexity of the phenomena, we can develop a sense of understanding of the meanings imparted by the individuals to phenomena and their social context. ***Human behaviour is affected by knowledge of the social world*** is the fourth assumption. Interpretivism proposes that there are multiple and not single realities of phenomena, and that these realities can differ across time and place. That knowledge and understanding of the social world and the realities being constructed increase and enrich our theoretical and conceptual framework. The final assumption proposes that ***the social world does not "exist" independently of human knowledge.*** As I proceeded through this research process, my knowledge and humanness informed and directed me and often subtleties, such as my intuition, values, beliefs or a priori knowledge influenced my understanding of the phenomena under investigation. Therefore as researchers, our culture, our own experiences and history may influence the research process and thus the results of the research study. Thus, one of the criticisms of the interpretivist paradigm is that it is subjective. However, interpretivism implies that researcher bias is not a challenge *per se* as it was, to me as researcher, acceptable to be subjectively involved in the research process. Interpretivists believe that research is reliable if researchers can demonstrate interpretative awareness. In other words, they have to acknowledge the subjectivity they bring to the research process and take the necessary steps to address the implications of their subjectivity. In this regard, interpretative researchers understand that their research actions affect the research objects that they study. They also understand that the

research objects in turn affect them; therefore the researcher and the research object are interdependent (Cohen *et al.*, 2003; Weber, 2004; Nieuwenhuis, 2007a).

From the above assumptions, by undertaking this research study from an interpretivist paradigmatic viewpoint, it implied that I am interested in how the participants interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2002; Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004; Bryman, 2004). Ontology concerns the nature of reality and being. My **ontological stance** proposes that reality is subjective and influenced by the context of the situation, namely the individual's experience and perceptions, the social environment, and the interaction between the participant and the researcher. Furthermore, interpretivism believes in multiple, constructed realities rather than a single true reality. Epistemology is concerned with the relationship between the research participant and the researcher. With regard to the *epistemological approach,* interpretivists maintain that reality is socially constructed and, therefore, the dynamic interaction between researcher and research participant is central to capturing and describing the "lived experiences" (Erlebnis) of the participant. *Axiology* concerns the role of the researcher values in the scientific process. Interpretivists maintain that the researcher's values and lived experiences (Erlebnis) cannot be separated from the research process. Working from an interpretivist approach the researcher should acknowledge, describe and "bracket" their values but not eliminate them. To that aim interpretivists are encouraged to keep a reflective journal. *Rhetorical structure* refers to the language used to present the research process and results to one's intended audience. *Methodology* refers to the process and procedures of the research; qualitative research methods that would involve researcher and participant interactions were chosen (Ponterotto, 2005; Cohen *et al*., 2003; Schwandt, 2000; Weber, 2004).

In working from an interpretevist view, the focus of this study was to gain an understanding of the "lived experiences" of students during the practicum. During this study the students were given the opportunity to share anecdotes that related to their experiences gained through the Educational Psychology community engagement practicum.

3.3.2   A QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Qualitative research is an inquiry process that has certain common features, such as a holistic approach, a focus on human experiences and a sustained contact with individuals in their natural settings, a high level of researcher involvement and the production of descriptive or narrative data. The goal of qualitative research is to explore and understand a central phenomenon and to understand the experiences of the participants within the central phenomenon (Munhall, 2001; Ivankova, Creswell & Clark, 2007).

Qualitative research seeks to answer questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit those settings. Qualitative research explores how people structure and give meaning to their daily lives and examine how people learn about and make sense of themselves and others. The goal of qualitative research

is to describe and understand rather than explain and predict human behaviour. The primary aim is to gather in-depth descriptions and understanding of events, as well as to understand social action in terms of its specific context (Berg, 2001; Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Thus, qualitative research views the world through the perspective of the participants in the research study and the qualitative researcher interprets and gives meaning to the experiences of the participants and sees things from their point of view (Babbie and Mouton, 2001).

I chose to follow a qualitative approach, to understand the subjective meanings and personal experiences of the students of Educational Psychology. As this was a descriptive study, qualitative research emphasised descriptive detailed information about the social worlds being examined. That descriptive detail enhanced my understanding of the experiences of the students who participated in this study (Bryman, 2004). As a qualitative researcher, the perspectives of the participants and what they view as being important and significant - provided the point of orientation for this research study. In addition, I also sought to understand the behaviour of the participants, and their values and beliefs, to genuinely understand the world through their eyes (Bryman, 2004).

3.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this section a detailed description of the research methodology that was employed in conducting this study is provided. Methodology '*specifies how the researcher may go about practically studying whatever he or she believes can be known'* (De Vos & Fouché, 1998:6).

3.4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN: CASE STUDY DESIGN

An *instrumental case study design* was selected for the purpose of this study, which is discussed in detail below**.** This study was conducted according to an ***instrumental case design*** (Stake, 2000)*,* with the focus being on the experiences of students of Educational Psychology of their community engagement practicum. The application of an instrumental case study design enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of and insight into the life-worlds of the participants in this research, to identify cases rich in information, to then answer the research question (Patton, 1990; Mouton, 2001; Henning *et al*., 2004).

A case study can be defined as '*an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit'* (Merriam, 2002:205). Case studies involve systematically gathering enough information about a particular person, social setting, event, or group to permit the researcher to effectively understand how it operates or functions. Thus, case studies provide researchers with an understanding of complex social phenomenon while preserving the holistic and meaningful characteristics of everyday events and are a valuable tool for understanding human behaviour in depth (Berg, 2001; Merriam, 2002). Berg (2001) and Stake (2000) emphasise that the main purpose of an *instrumental case study* is to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalisation, as well as to assist the researcher to gain a better understanding of a theoretical question or problem. Thus, the case is of secondary interest, it will serve a supportive role, a background against which the actual research interests will play out (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Although the selected case was investigated

in depth, the context analysed and regular activities detailed (Stake, 2000), the case merely served a supportive role during which the actual research interest could be explored. In this way, rich and thick descriptions were gained of the ways in which the students who participated in this study experienced a community engagement practicum.

One of the advantages of an instrumental case study is that it draws the researcher towards illustrating how the concerns of researchers and theorists are manifest in the case. Therefore, it not only highlights what is important about particular cases but also looks at the critical issues at hand (Stake, 2000). Other advantages are that thickly described case studies take multiple perspectives into account and understand the influences of multilevel social systems on subjects' perspectives and behaviours (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

Cohen *et al.* (2003) mention that some of the challenges faced when using a case study are the following: the results may not be generalisable (except where other readers or researchers see their application), they are not easily open to cross-checking, may be selective, biased, personal and subjective, and may be prone to problems of observer bias. Despite the above challenges, research from an interpretivist paradigm does not require generalisations, as the focus is on exploring and describing the case and not generalising the results. In this study, I aimed to explore the experience of students of Educational Psychology of their community engagement practicum. This project did not seek to declare ultimate truth, which implies that the purpose was on exploring, rather than on generalising and establishing truth. I aimed to seek transferable rather than generalisable findings, by presenting adequate rich, descriptive information of the experiences of the students who participated in this study, as well as subjective meanings of the individuals that emerged during the research process. (Shenton, 2004; Seale, 2000; Nieuwenhuis, 2007b).

3.4.1.1   Selection of case and participants

The case consisted of the MEd Educational Psychology module and the participants were the individuals who partook in the focus group sessions.

TABLE: 3.1:   SELECTION OF CASE AND PARTICIPANTS

CASE	MEd Educational Psychology module, Career Assessment and Counselling [BOP 804] - Department of Educational Psychology, University of Pretoria.
PARTICIPANTS	▪ First focus group (pilot study) - 4 Educational Psychology students ▪ Second focus group- 8 Educational Psychology students

My selection of an institution for the purposes of this study, from which to work, was done through ***convenience sampling*** (Cohen *et al*, 2003). The reason for this choice was that I had only recently completed my studies toward a Master's Degree at the University of Pretoria and still had access to both the University and its students. I was easily able to access suitable facilities to work from and conclude the focus group task toward this study.

Furthermore, I had already established positive relationships with the staff and students there, which played some part in the selection of participants.

One focus group was ***purposefully selected*** for the pilot study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001), and a second focus group was later chosen. The reason for choosing that sampling technique was that the aim of this research study was to investigate the experiences of students in an Educational Psychology practicum. As stated elsewhere, the purpose of this study was not to generalise the findings but rather to gain insight regarding the experiences of students in a practicum. Furthermore, the participants were carefully selected to encompass diverse experiences and perspectives, which is the essence and significance of the purposive sampling technique (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Patton, 2002; Cohen *et al*., 2003). Table 3.2 and Table 3.3 indicate the race, age, language and gender of the participants who partook in this research study.

TABLE: 3.2:   PARTICULARS OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE FIRST FOCUS GROUP (PILOT STUDY)

PARTICIPANTS	AGE	RACE	LANGUAGE	GENDER
Participant 1	38	White	Afrikaans	Male
Participant 2	37	White	Afrikaans	Female
Participant 3	31	Black	SiSwati	Female
Participant 4	48	Black	North Sotho	Female

TABLE: 3.3:   PARTICULARS OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE SECOND FOCUS GROUP

PARTICIPANTS	AGE	RACE	LANGUAGE	GENDER
Participant 1	23	Black	IsiXhosa	Female
Participant 2	32	White	Afrikaans	Female
Participant 3	30	White	English	Female
Participant 4	26	White	Afrikaans	Female
Participant 5	32	White	Afrikaans	Female
Participant 6	26	White	Afrikaans	Female
Participant 7	29	White	Afrikaans	Female
Participant 8	24	White	Afrikaans	Female

The participants were selected purposefully in accordance to the following criteria (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001):

▪   Each participant was a student of Master's of Education who had participated in an Educational Psychology community engagement practicum module.

▪   The age, race and gender of each participant varied, to provide the research study with diverse and rich details of their experiences during the practicum.

One of the challenges of utilising purposeful and convenience sampling lies in the difficulty of generalising to other subjects, researcher bias and less representative of an identified population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). However, as stated before the purpose of this research study is not to generalise the findings.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

The data collection steps include setting the boundaries for the study, collecting information through several methods, as well as establishing the protocol for recording information (Creswell, 2003). I employed multiple methods, namely: (i) focus groups (ii) reflective journals (iii) visual data (photographs), as strategies to add depth and richness to this study. Employing multiple methods is the process of *crystallization,* whereby different methods are used to add and reflect different nuances to the data gathered. The process of crystallization proved to be supportive during the course of this research, enhancing the richness and complexity of the view of the reality being researched, namely the experiences of students of an Educational Psychology community engagement practicum (Janesick, 2000). The methods used during the data collection process are discussed below.

3.5.1 FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups are a form of group interview that capitalises on communication between participants in order to generate data. As a form of qualitative research, focus groups are group interviews where the focus is on the interaction within the group, based on topics that are supplied by the researcher who, typically, takes the role of the moderator. Thus the researcher's interest provides the focus, whereas the data themselves come from the group interaction. The hallmark of focus groups is their explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group. Focus groups are particularly useful for exploring an individual's knowledge and experiences and can be used to examine not only what people think but also how they think and why they think that way (Morgan, 1997; Kitzinger, 1995).

Focus groups create a social environment in which participants are stimulated by the perceptions, opinions and ideas of one another, which increases the richness of the data. In addition, focus groups are used to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives and experiences of the participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

Focus groups have instances when they will be preferred and others when they should be avoided. This summary will argue that both the strengths and weaknesses of focus groups flow directly from the two defining features: the reliance on the researcher's focus and the group interaction (Morgan, 1997). The strength of relying on focus groups is their ability to produce concentrated amounts of data on precisely the topic of interest and reliance on the interaction of the group to produce the data (Morgan, 1997; Greeff, 2005). Focus groups are economical on time, as they produce a large amount of data in a short period of time. The comparisons the research participants make between each other's experiences and opinions are a valuable source of insight into

complex behaviours and motivations. The group setting may provide a stimulating and secure environment for members to express ideas without fear of criticism. The synergy of the group has the potential to uncover important constructs, which may be lost with individually generated data. The group also helps uncover dynamic emotional processes, which determine behaviour to a large extent. Focus groups create a fuller, deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied, and they stimulate spontaneous exchanges of ideas, thoughts, and attitudes in the security of a group (Morgan, 1997; Greeff, 2005, Nieuwenhuis, 2007b; Cohen *et al.*, 2003).

On the other hand, focus groups can be costly and all participants must be able to congregate in the same place and the same time, which is particularly difficult if the participants live in geographically distant regions. Through group processes, the information collected may be biased, such as; domination of the discussions by the more outspoken individuals, groupthink, and the difficulty of assessing the viewpoints of less assertive participants. The findings cannot be generalised, as focus group samples are typically small and may not be representative. If the group facilitator is unskilled, passive participants may be unduly influenced or inhibited by active participants. Another criticism of focus groups cites social posturing between the participants or a desire to be polite and fit in with the norm, or else their forced compliance. Focus groups require researchers who are skilled in group processes. The moderator should have the ability to encourage while maintaining focus, because too much moderator control means that little of the perspectives of the participants will be voiced, however, too little moderator control can mean hearing less about the topic of interest. Thus, it is important that the rapport between the moderator and the group members can encourage participants to express their feelings fully and honestly, and may assist in overcoming some of the pitfalls referred to (Morgan, 1997; Greeff, 2005; Nieuwenhuis, 2007b).

For the purpose of this study, purposeful sampling was used, which was vital to the success of the focus group interview (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b). Therefore, during the research study group members were selected who represented the target population (see par. 3.4.1.1). Being a novice researcher, a pilot focus group was first conducted. A pilot study is defined as "a small study that is conducted prior to a larger piece of research to determine whether the methodology, sampling, instruments and analysis are adequate and appropriate "(Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000:155). As the first focus group was considered a pilot study, transcriptions, reflective journals and visual data from the first focus group were not analysed or interpreted. The second focus group was then conducted, in which I focused on staying within the time limit and maintaining researcher objectivity, acting as the moderator for the group; posing questions, keeping the discussion flowing and enabling group members to participate fully (Wilkinson, 2004; Nieuwenhuis, 2007b). The data collected from the second focus group was analysed and interpreted for this study. (See Appendix D for the semi-structured focus group interview schedule.)

The focus group interview was held in a secure and quiet room and the chairs for the participants were arranged in a circle with the audiotape recorder in the middle, to record the conversations of the experiences those students had of community engagement in an Educational Psychology practicum. The audio taping of the focus group session allowed a much fuller record of data than notes taken during the interview would have done, as writing down the answers is time consuming and that may become a distraction. Therefore, by incorporating the

use of a tape recorder in those sessions, I was enabled to fully concentrate on the flow of proceedings during the focus groups and decide what to concentrate on next (Greeff, 2005).

The focus group data was later transcribed and analysed (see par.3.6). Thereafter a copy of the analysed transcriptions was emailed to each participant, who then participated in member checking, to assist in ascertaining the accuracy of the recorded data and the interpretation thereof (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). In consequence, Participant 7 requested certain comments made during our focus group discussion to be removed from the final document of transcriptions, which was granted. An ethical principle that supports this study is to gain informed consent from each participant for all that this study may report, to ensure that their participation does not cause them distress. Examples of pages from the transcribed focus group interview are provided in Appendix E.

3.5.2   REFLECTIVE JOURNALS

A reflective journal is a document in which the human and personal characteristics of the author find expression and, through its means, the reader can come to know the author's views of the events on which the message is focused (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). During the practicum, after each session at a secondary school in Mpumalanga, the students made notes of their daily experiences in reflective journals. Those reflective journals were later submitted to the university as a part of their portfolio of evidence and after obtaining verbal and written consent[1], I was then able to access those reflective journals for data collection and analysis. After conducting thematic analysis (see par.3.6) on the entries in the journals, the findings were interpreted. That process enabled me to gather information that represents the immediate recordings of reflections on experiences, unimpaired by researcher reconstructions and distortions of memory (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

3.5.3   VISUAL DATA

As a further source of data, I used photographs taken by the students and their facilitators during the course of their practicum, of the students working with their group of learners[2] at the secondary school in Mpumalanga. The advantage of using visual material to extract data is that people easily relate to images, which are so pervasive in society (Cohen *et al*., 2003; Creswell, 2008). The analysis of those photographs contributed a further perspective from which to explore the experiences of students of Educational Psychology of their community engagement practicum.

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[1]   Participants were requested to provide their reflective journals as data for the study. The students did this voluntarily and extracts from their reflective journals are provided in Appendix G.

[2]   Students and learners gave informed consent for photographs to be taken during the practicum. A copy of the letter of consent from the participants in this research is provided in Appendix B.

PLATE 3.1:   A STUDENT INTERACTING WITH A GROUP OF LEARNERS

Students interacted with learners during the practicum. This photograph shows learners engaging in an activity that was planned by the student.

3.6   DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Data analysis in qualitative research is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data for analysis, then reducing that data into themes through a process of coding and condensing those codes and, finally, representing that data in figures, tables, or a discussion (De Vos, 2005; Creswell, 2007). Qualitative data analysis is usually based on an interpretative philosophy that is aimed at examining meaningful and symbolic content of qualitative data. Therefore, it tries to establish the meaning participants attach to specific phenomenon by analysing their perceptions, attitudes, understanding, knowledge, values, feelings and experiences to approximate their construction of the phenomenon (Nieuwenhuis, 2007c). For the purpose of this study, data was analysed by implementing *thematic analysis.* That enabled me to evaluate key words, meanings, themes, messages and meanings obtained from the data collected (Cohen *et al.*, 2003) with the aim of establishing what students experienced during the Educational Psychology practicum.

The thematic analysis and interpretation was conducted in the following manner: The transcripts and participant reflective journals were read through, to become familiar with the content from both data sources. The data was then reduced into themes through a process of coding and condensing those codes and, finally, representing the data in figures, tables and discussions, which are presented in Chapter 4 (Creswell, 2007)

During the data analysis and interpretation process (see Appendix F) the following steps guided the process: **Step one**- *organise and prepare the data for analysis.* That involved transcribing the transcripts of interviews from the focus group and reflective journals, optically scanning the material, sorting and arranging the data information into different types (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002; Creswell, 2008). **Step two**- *Becoming familiar with all the data.* It was vital to obtain a general sense of the information collected and to reflect on its overall meaning (Terre

Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). De Vos (2005) emphasises the importance of reading through all data sources in their entirety several times. It is vital that the researcher gets a sense of the data sources as a whole before breaking it into parts. The consequence of reading the data several times enables the researcher to become intimately familiar with the data. Therefore, I read and studied the data retrieved from the focus groups and participant reflective journals several times during the data analysis process, making notes in the margin of the transcripts and reflective journals to record general thoughts about the data (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). **Step three-** *Begin the coding process.* Coding is the process of organising the material into "chunks" before bringing meaning to those "chunks" of information. Against the background of the theoretical framework, I analysed the data by means of coding, which involved taking text data or pictures, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labelling those categories with an appropriate term which was often based in the actual language of a participant (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). By using coding in the data analysis process, I was able to move back and forth between steps as new insights and understandings emerged from the data sources. Consequently, after the open coding process was complete, *axial coding* was implemented in which connections were made between categories and subcategories of the data sources (i.e. the focus group transcripts and participant reflective journals). That process involved explaining and understanding relationships between categories in order to understand the phenomenon to which they related (Nieuwenhuis, 2007c). **Step four-** *Generating themes or categories for analysis.* That involved generating themes and categories that display multiple perspectives from the participants and can be supported by diverse quotations and specific evidence (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). **Step five**- *Representation of the themes.* That entails the presentation of the findings of the study, which may range from a detailed discussion of several themes (complete with sub-themes, specific illustrations, multiple perspectives from individuals, and quotations), or a discussion with interconnecting themes. In addition, visuals, figures or tables may be used in conjunction with the discussion (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002; Creswell, 2008). **Step six**- *Interpretation.* This is a written account of the phenomenon, as presented in Chapter 4, using thematic categories from the data analysis as sub-headings. That involves forming a larger meaning about the phenomenon based on personal views, comparisons with past research or both. Qualitative research is interpretive research, therefore it entails making meaning and sense of the findings (Creswell, 2003; Creswell, 2008).

The photographs were also analysed using the steps of the thematic analysis process. In analysing the photographs meaningful and symbolic content from the visual data was sought (Nieuwenhuis, 2007c). As stated by Viljoen (2004) cited in De Lange, Mitchell & Stuart (2007), the photographs provided an opportunity for me to work with a visual, concrete medium and not only field notes that might be subjective in nature.

The results of the thematic analysis are presented in tables. The tables are informed by the inclusion and exclusion criteria. In formulating inclusion and exclusion criteria, the focus is on who should be permitted to participate in the study and who should not participate. For instance the primary goal for inclusion criteria in this study was to have participants who had participated in the Educational Psychology practicum at the school in Mpumalanga. Therefore, the exclusion criteria would be of participants who had not participated in

the above community engagement practicum (Loue, 2000). However, for the purpose of this research study, **the inclusion and exclusion criteria** was utilised to include or exclude certain responses from the focus group interview and the participants' reflective journals according to their relevance to the theme or sub theme being discussed in the tables in chapter 4.

3.7 QUALITY CRITERIA

The basic premise of trustworthiness refers to the way in which the inquirer is able to convince the audience that the findings of a study are worth paying attention to and that the research is of a high quality (Maree, 2007; Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Schwandt, 2007). Therefore, the trustworthiness of this study was established in terms of four criteria that of *credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability* (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; De Vos, 2005). Those four constructs will now be addressed.

3.7.1 CREDIBILITY

Credibility aims to demonstrate that the inquiry was conducted in such a manner to ensure that the subject was accurately identified and described (De Vos, 2005). Seale (1999) states that credibility is built by prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation and triangulation exercises, as well as exposure of the research report to criticism by a disinterested peer reviewer and a search for negative instances that challenge emerging hypotheses and demand their reformulation. The following strategies were employed to establish credibility (Babbie & Mouton, 2001):

- *Triangulation.* I established credibility by applying triangulation to the methods of data collection and data analysis, to determine whether there were any discrepancies in my research findings. To find regularities in the data, different sources and methods were employed to observe whether the same patterns kept on reoccurring. The different methods of data collection used in this research project to ensure credibility were the focus groups, participant reflective journals and visual data (photographs) (Maree, 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

- *Member checks.* I presented a transcript of the interviews, the data analysis of the interviews and the reflective journals to the participants in this research, to have those participants ascertain the accuracy of the data collected and the interpretation thereof. The aim of the member check process was to assess the intentionality of the participants, to correct obvious errors, and to have them provide additional volunteer information (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

3.7.2 TRANSFERABILITY

Babbie and Mouton (2001) describe transferability as the extent to which the findings can be applied in other contexts or with other respondents. Seal (1999) further states that transferability involves providing rich descriptions of the setting studied, so that readers are given sufficient information to be able to judge the applicability of findings to other settings of which they know. As a qualitative researcher and to ensure

transferability, I used rich, thick descriptions of the participants and contexts by supplying a large volume of clear and detailed information about the experiences of students of Educational Psychology of their community engagement practicum.

3.7.3   DEPENDABILITY

Dependability is focused on the process of the inquiry and the inquirer's responsibility for ensuring that the process was logical, traceable, and documented (see the Appendices) (Schwandt, 2007). Dependability consists of the researchers' documentation of data, methods and decisions made during the research project, as well as its end product (Seale, 1999). Therefore, the inquirer should be able to provide the audience with evidence that should the research process be repeated with the same or similar respondents (subjects) in the same (or a similar) context, its findings would also be similar (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). As previously mentioned, the aim of this study was not to generalise but rather to gain an in-depth understanding of the ways in which students of Educational Psychology experienced their community engagement practicum. Since I continually sought contributions from other persons during the data analysis process, namely, the research participants and my supervisors, the possibility of the findings of this study being fairly dependable was strengthened and would be transferable to other similar groups of people and situations (Shenton, 2004).

3.7.4   CONFIRMABILITY

Confirmability is the degree to which the findings are the product of the focus of the inquiry and not on the biases of the researcher (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Babbie & Mouton (2001) refer to Lincoln and Guba's confirmability audit trial, in which an adequate trail should be left by the researcher to enable the auditor to determine if the conclusions, interpretations, and recommendations can be traced to their sources and if they are supported by the inquiry. In this study, a trail was conducted by using methods such as recorded audiotapes, summaries, condensed notes and themes that were developed as well as personal notes. In addition, Seal (1999) states that confirmability involves reflexivity, in which a methodological self-critical account of how the research was done is documented. During the research process, I recorded my reflections on the research process in my own research journal (see Appendix H).

3.8   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Due to the social nature of the research, while undertaking this research I not only had a responsibility towards my profession in the search for knowledge and truth, but also towards the research participants (Strydom, 1998; Cohen *et al.,* 2003). It is, therefore, essential that throughout the research process the researcher follows and abides by ethical guidelines (Maree, 2007). Firstly, as an intern Educational Psychologist, I adhered to the ethical code of the Health Professions Council of South Africa when working with participants. I aimed, at all times, to preserve the human dignity of the participants. Furthermore, I adhered to ethical research principles to ensure that the participants were not deceived before or during the research process; they knew what was happening

and did not experience any form of harm or distress (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Cohen *et al*., 2003). Those principles will now be briefly discussed.

3.8.1 INFORMED CONSENT

Firstly, I obtained written informed consent from the Dean of Groenkloof Campus, Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, to conduct this research (Appendix A). Secondly, I obtained written informed consent from the students who participated in the research process (see Appendix B). This implies that the research participants knew they had a right to choose whether to participate in the research process after being informed of the facts that would be likely to influence their decisions (Cohen *et al*., 2003).

3.8.2 PRIVACY, CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

The principle of privacy was applied, meaning that the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants was protected at all times (Strydom, 1998; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Cohen *et al*., 2003). The identities of the research participants were not disclosed during the study and all information obtained during the research process was dealt with in a confidential manner. Further, I exercised special care that the audio-visual material, transcripts and other data were always preserved in a safe manner in the research offices at the University of Pretoria.

3.8.3 PROTECTION FROM HARM

Research should never injure the people being studied, regardless of whether they volunteer for the study (Babbie, 1995). Therefore, I focused on avoiding (or at least recognising and communicating) probable risk to the participants, such as exposure to psychological, physical or social harm (Strydom, 1998; Berg, 2001).

3.9 MY ROLE AS RESEARCHER

Within the interpretivist field of study the role of researcher entails being an active participant as interviewer, which includes the researcher forming a vital part of the data. As a student of Educational Psychology from the University of Pretoria, I had also experienced the Educational Psychology practicum at the school in Mpumalanga. In addition, the research participants in this study are my colleagues. Subsequently, because of personal past experiences from the practicum and the relationship with my peers, I brought certain biases to this study. Although every effort was made to ensure objectivity, these biases may have shaped the way the collected data was viewed and understood and the way my experiences were interpreted (Cresswell, 2003).

Therefore, I commenced this study acknowledging the importance of reflexivity. Having been involved in the rigorous experience with the participants it became necessary to continually recognise participant bias, values and personal interest with regard to the research topic and processes (Maree, 2007). By consciously focusing on reflexivity, I monitored my own reaction, roles, biases, and any matters that might bias this research. Thus, and

by keeping my own reflective journal, I aimed to be acutely aware of ways in which my selectivity, perceptions, background, inductive processes and paradigms may have influenced this research (Cohen *et al*., 2003). In addition, I reflected with my supervisors (see Appendix H).

3.10   CONCLUSION

In Chapter 3 the paradigmatic perspective, research design, methodology and data analysis and interpretation procedures that were utilised in the research study were explained. Further, the ethical guidelines, quality criteria of the research, as well as the role of the researcher were discussed. In Chapter 4, the results of the data analysis and data interpretation processes are presented.

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CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 presented a detailed description of the paradigmatic perspective, research design, research methodology, data analysis and interpretation procedures applied for this research study. That chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical guidelines and quality criteria that I considered for the purpose of this study.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed discussion of the results of the thematic analysis and supporting evidence for the transcribed focus group interviews, reflective journals and visual data. Verbatim responses and visual images are used to enrich the discussion. Those results discuss the experiences of students of Educational Psychology of their community engagement practicum, at a secondary school in Mpumalanga.

4.2 FINDINGS OF THE THEMATIC ANALYSIS

In total four main themes and eight subthemes were identified during thematic analysis. Those themes are related to the experiences of students of Educational Psychology of their community engagement practicum. Figure 4.1 (see p.54) is a visual representation of the different themes and categories to be discussed throughout this chapter. As stated in chapter 3, the inclusion and exclusion criteria was used to determine which participant's responses from the focus group interview and the participants' reflective journals are relevant to the different themes and subthemes discussed in this chapter.

4.2.1 THEME 1: STUDENTS GAIN INSIGHTS INTO THEMSELVES AS EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS

During the practicum the students who participated in this study gained insight into themselves as Educational Psychologists working in the South African context.

TABLE 4.1: DEFINITION, SUBTHEMES, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE THEME 'STUDENTS GAIN INSIGHTS INTO THEMSELVES AS EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS IN SOUTH AFRICA'

Definition	This relates to students gaining insights into themselves as Educational Psychologists in the South African context:
Subthemes	Two themes that emerged are discussed, namely, working meaningfully within constraints and limitations and insight into diversity.
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'time was too short,' 'reach more people,' 'difficult to communicate,' and 'it made me respect diversity' were considered descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'unlimited time' and 'communication' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated for the purpose of this study.

Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

4.2.1.1   Subtheme 1.1: Working meaningfully within constraints and limitations

Students divulged how they were able to work meaningfully when faced with certain constraints and limitations during a community engagement practicum. They experienced the *limited time frame in training* and *creatively engaging with language* as challenging. On the other hand, they viewed *reaching more people as Educational Psychologists* and *awareness of contexts Educational Psychologists can work in* as meaningful. Students also demonstrated how they chose to address those challenges in a meaningful way.

▪   **Limited time frame in training**

TABLE 4.2:   DEFINITION, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY 'LIMITED TIME FRAME IN TRAINING'

Definition	This relates to the limited time frame spent at a school-community in Mpumalanga:
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'time was too short,' 'not much time,' and 'an hour a day' were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'several hours' and 'unlimited time' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

The participants emphasised that they felt they spent too little time with the learners at the school in Mpumalanga. This is supported by the following comments:

I mean we spent only an hour a day with the children, all together for four days (Participant 1).

I felt the time was too short (Participant 1).

I enjoyed planning the activities and was disappointed when I heard that we were going to have less time with the learners than what was originally planned (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 7).[3]

In addition, the limited time at the practicum affected one student's ability to establish rapport with her group of learners. The following statement supports this:

But the thing is there is not much time to actually establish rapport with them (Participant 7).

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[3]   Participant 7's reflective journal was translated from Afrikaans to English.

THEME 1: STUDENTS GAIN INSIGHTS INTO THEMSELVES AS EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS IN SOUTH AFRICA

THEME 2: EXPERIENCES OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Sub-theme 1.1: Working meaningfully within constraints and limitations

Limited time frame in training, reaching more people as educational psychologists, awareness of contexts educational psychologists can work in and creatively engaging with language.

Sub-theme 1.2: Insight into diversity

Working with groups as educational psychologists, exposure to children of different ages, exposure to learners of a different race during the practicum, students' insights into different socio-economic backgrounds and students gained insight into working with a different gender.

Sub-theme 2.1: Acquired Educational Psychology skills

Students' gained confidence in their abilities as educational psychologists, Students experience a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment, students had to adapt to the unknown during the practicum and students' reflexivity was enhanced.

Sub-theme 2.2: Insight into professional roles

Students' formed partnerships with the educators from the secondary school and students' expressed perceptions of an 'ideal' and 'real' role of an educational psychologist.

Students' experiences of a community engagement practicum

THEME 3: INTEGRATION OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

THEME 4: EXPERIENCES RELATED TO STRUCTURING A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRACTICUM

Subtheme 3.1: Personal experiences of theory application during practicum

Understanding theory by means of application and understanding community engagement as educational psychologists.

Sub-theme 3.2: Theories applied during the practicum

Asset-based approach applied during interventions, students' realisation of the role of the asset-based approach in their personal life, understanding positive psychology as educational psychologists-in-training and other theories applied as educational-psychologists-in-training.

Sub-theme 4.1: Students' recommendations regarding challenges they experienced

A need for briefing prior to the community engagement practicum, students' recommendations regarding evaluating the impact, effectiveness and significance of their practicum contributions, student recommendations regarding reflexivity.

Sub-theme 4.2: Students' experiences of feedback

Students' experiences of feedback received during reflective dialogue, feedback from learners during interactions.

FIGURE 4.1:   STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRACTICUM

Even though the time limit was a hindrance for the students, they stated that they were still able to cope with the practicum:

I actually feel that I did make a difference, even if the time was short; I got through most of my activities (Participant 8).

Overall I think those challenges; I think facilitated growth firstly in myself, because it helped me to deal with things (Participant 3).

▪   **Reaching more people as Educational Psychologists**

TABLE 4.3:   DEFINITION, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY 'REACHING MORE PEOPLE AS EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS'

Definition	Reaching more people in the community as Educational Psychologists:
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'reach more people,' and 'reach a lot of children' were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'reaching a few individuals,' 'individuals,' and 'a client' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

PLATE 4.1:   STUDENTS WORKED WITH A GROUP OF LEARNERS AT A TIME

Students expressed that by getting involved within a rural school setting, they had the opportunity as Educational Psychologists, to offer their services to more people within the community. They expressed that they had realised that their services were not limited to a few individuals but, rather, they realised that working with communities

would enable them to provide services to many children at a time, especially to individuals who would not necessarily be able to financially afford the services of an Educational Psychologist. The photograph depicts the students working with many learners at a time, within the school-community. The photograph emphasises the experience of students offering their services to more individuals and, as a result, reaching more people as Educational Psychologists.

The research participants expressed the following:

I like community work because I think it is a good thing, you reach more people (Participant 7).

But when we went to ******, I realised that actually through group work, you can reach so many more children (Participant 4).

You actually get to reach a lot of children who actually cannot afford to come to you (Participant 1).

I think this is also a more practical approach in South Africa because you can reach more people that have limited resources (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 7).

▪ **Awareness of contexts Educational Psychologists can work in**

TABLE 4.4: DEFINITION, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY 'AWARENESS OF CONTEXTS EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS CAN WORK IN

Definition	Students were made aware of the different contexts that they can work in as Educational Psychologists:
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'possibilities,' 'make a difference,' and 'work one day' were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'impossible,' 'present career,' and 'indifference' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.
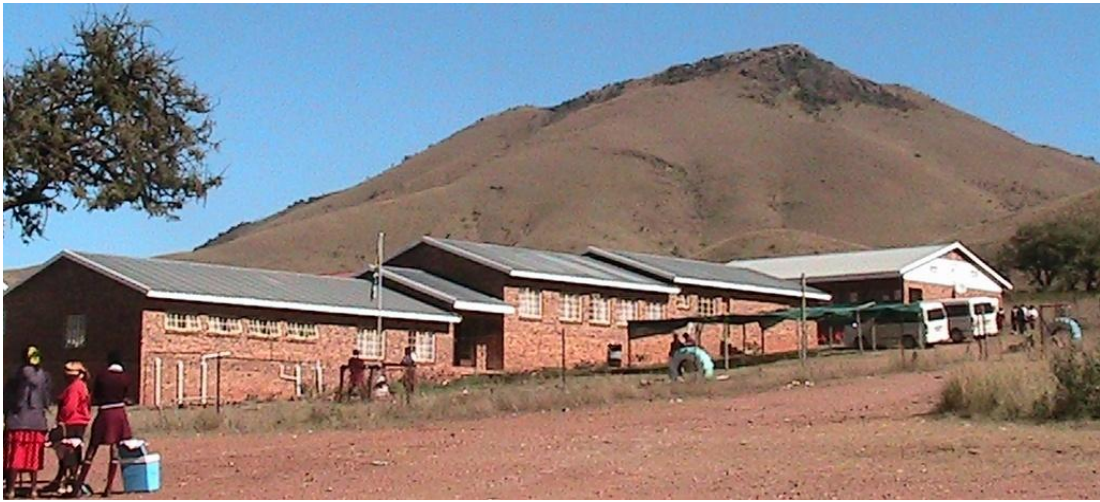
PLATE 4.2:   THE SCHOOL SETTING IN MPUMALANGA

The practicum gave the students the opportunity to engage in a community. Consequently, they reported that the exposure opened up their perception to possibilities of, in the future, engaging in community engagement activities and even orienting their careers towards community engagement. The photograph illustrates a new context that differs from the university (academic) context, where the students train and practice as educational-psychologists-in-training. The photograph emphasises that the experiences of students of the above indicated practicum setting made them aware of future contexts that they could work in as Educational Psychologists. This is supported by the following quotations:

I would really like to do this kind of work in underprivileged areas when I have completed my studies (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 4).

Yeah, it just opened up my eyes to things where or possibilities where I could work one day, what I could do, what's really more, sort of satisfying and fulfilling and you can make a difference everywhere not just in an office or in a school or in a little private practice (Participant 3).

I never really had an opportunity to do something like that and when I got to *******, it was like, yeah, this is actually, what I would like to do (Participant 5).

▪   **Creatively engaging with language**

TABLE 4.5:   DEFINITION, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY 'CREATIVELY ENGAGING WITH LANGUAGE'

Definition	Students had to work with language barriers during the practicum:
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'second language speakers,' 'communicate,' and 'English' were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'first language speakers' and 'communicated easily' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated

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	for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

Many of the students experienced language as having been a communication barrier during the practicum. Pillay and Kometsi (2007) state that language is usually a challenge for practitioners in non-urban settings, as the vast majority of psychologists in South Africa speak no indigenous language, apart from Afrikaans. Students expressed that the language barrier may have affected their abilities to assess the learners and to implement their interventions:

I knew the learners were second language speakers but I was not prepared for the fact that very few of them really understood English at a level to be able to communicate (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 6).

It was also difficult to communicate, as most of the learners are SiSwati speaking (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 2).

So especially language wise, that for me was a big thing because, how should you prepare your stuff and your forms, what language? Can you just make it in English, should you make it really simple or are you then going to sort of insult them (Participant 5).

At times the language barrier affected the learners' ability to understand the activities they had to do with the Educational Psychology students:

So I think it was the language barrier, because they didn't know exactly how to talk to me, so they would tell each other, no you must do this or that because they didn't know how to ask me, how to do it differently and I tried to explain but then I see even though I explained three times, they don't understand, so I think there was a big language barrier (Participant 4).

It was really difficult to communicate some of the concepts to them since we do not have the same mother tongue language to communicate with (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 4).

At the end when we discussed goals and why it is important. I got the feeling that not all of them grasped the concept but some definitely did (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 6).

The exposure and engagement of the students with several languages enriched their understanding of diversity. Students used various creative and flexible methods to overcome language barrier, namely, utilising dictionaries from fellow students, students used visual images such as posters and pictures to communicate with the learners, students employed the help of other learners who understood the English language as interpreters and even utilised body language to communicate with the learners. This is supported by the following quotations:

It was a barrier at first for me, and then I borrowed Participant 7's dictionary, and the second time I got the dictionary, the words, everything and it showed me how to overcome a barrier by using an asset (Participant 7).

The posters they made was just beautiful and even though many of them struggled to understand me and I had to use one of the boys who understood English well, to interpret (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 6).

We interacted with body language and I tried to show them that I care and wanted to be there. We interacted with pictures as well (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 2).

4.2.1.2   Subtheme 1.2: Insight into diversity

Students discuss their scope of practice and their experiences with the diversity they encountered during the practicum.

- **Working with groups as Educational Psychologists**

TABLE **4.6:**   DEFINITION, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY 'WORKING WITH GROUPS AS EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS'

Definition	Students worked with groups of learners instead of individuals:
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'groups' and 'working', were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'individuals' and 'a client' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

According to Pillay (2007), psychologists should rather focus on working with groups, than only working with individuals. That is especially essential in the South African context, if more people are to be reached in terms of psychological interventions as highlighted in Subtheme 1.1. Students expressed that they gained experience in working with groups:

I learnt to work with groups, because I am also very shy and I don't like talking in front of people but with my group, it wasn't difficult for me (Participant 4).

It is also an opportunity to expand our experience regarding group assessment and intervention. It is important as the need for group counselling has increased over the last few years (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 7).

I feel more confident in working with groups (Participant 4).

PLATE 4.3: STUDENTS LEARNING TO WORK WITH GROUPS DURING THE PRACTICUM

In the above photograph, one of the students is working with a group of learners from a secondary school in Mpumalanga. Students expressed the practicum gave them the opportunity to gain skills in working with groups.

▪ **Exposure to children of different ages**

TABLE 4.7: DEFINITION, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY 'EXPOSURE TO CHILDREN OF DIFFERENT AGES'

Definition	Students were exposed to adolescents during the practicum:
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'high school' and 'teenagers' were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'toddlers,' 'infants,' and 'child' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

In the university (academic) setting most of the experiences of students derive from working with young children. The students expressed that they gained more experience, from this practicum, of working with adolescents:

I see this as an opportunity to expand my experience with teenagers. I would like to work with the whole spectrum of age groups one day and this is just another opportunity to prepare me for that (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 7).

Just seeing that you do get through to certain learners, I've never worked with high school people (Participant 3).

Because I am not used to high school learners (Participant 8).

I was difficult because some of my activities, I think I developed too difficult activities and it would have been easier if I knew at which level they were because I didn't really know because I haven't worked with teenagers a lot (Participant 4).

▪ **Exposure to learners of a different race during the practicum**

TABLE 4.8: DEFINITION, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY 'EXPOSURE TO LEARNERS OF A DIFFERENT RACE DURING THE PRACTICUM'

Definition	Students were exposed to different ethnicities:
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'diversity,' 'different,' and 'cultures' were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'similar,' 'national,' and 'tribal' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

Pillay (2007) states that trainee psychologists should be exposed and equipped to work with different racial and ethnic individuals and communities. He mentions that students should acquire knowledge and skills to work in different contexts with different people. The community engagement practicum gave the students the opportunity to work with diverse cultures. The opportunity to work with diverse cultures was expressed by several of the students:

It was an opportunity to work with diverse cultures, foreign languages (Participant 2).

The opportunity to work with such rich diversity has enriched my learning experience (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 3).

It made me respect diversity more, just in the fact that, you know, we are all different but we can all work together so well (Participant 3).

In addition, students learnt that when working with their clients it is important to have background information, to be able to understand their clients better:

You have to take that background into account, and then you have another picture or view of this person and their world and what everything means to them and that really makes sense to me then (Participant 6).

Students gained knowledge on the importance of taking into consideration a client's cultural background.

But just to realise that there's different things and to also take into consideration their culture (Participant 5).

However, one student's experience of working with learners of a different race illustrates the complexities problematised by community engagement when students work with 'the other'. The process of engaging with those we perceive as different from ourselves is termed as 'Othering' (Canales, 2000). If individuals engage in role taking, in which they view the world from the other's perspective, they begin to understand the meaning of the other's world. On the other hand, individuals who have difficulty with role taking have trouble interacting with others or their interactions are based on misconceptions and stereotypes (Canales, 2000). 'Othering' was expressed by the following quotes:

It wasn't nice when they stole my stationary, so I didn't like that, although I interpreted it as they like me, they like the therapist, so they take something of the therapist and it could also be….., cos I overheard what people were saying, "the white people came and they are going to give us things, so let's sit back because they must give us" (Participant 7).

Sometimes I felt that they were laughing at these people because you know (ha ha) what do they know about us, you know what I mean. These were kind of racial remarks, because they are not used to us and then this language barrier as well, because many people say something, so they can say to people who don't understand the language, they can say anything (Participant 7).

Students expressed that being an Educational Psychologist within South Africa implies the ability to work with different cultures:

Getting to know that there's different people, in different circumstances and cultures, because that is South Africa, the reality (Participant 5).

- **Students' insights into different socio-economic backgrounds**

TABLE 4.9:   DEFINITION, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY 'STUDENTS' INSIGHTS INTO DIFFERENT SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS'

Definition	Students gained insight into different socio-economic backgrounds:
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'disadvantaged,' 'poverty,' and 'struggling' were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'deprived,' 'destitute,' and 'needy' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

The community engagement experience made the students aware of different socio-economic backgrounds, to be taken into consideration when working as an Educational Psychologist within different contexts in South Africa:

You think you know what poverty is, you think you know what it means to be disadvantaged and then you get there and it's like I didn't know, now I know what it means and then I understood (Participant 6).

You know there are people that are struggling and yet they can make things work (Participant 3).

Absolutely, I really think that I am quite a sheltered person, I come from a middle class family in a city where I've sort of got things available to me and working in a rural area or an area where there weren't many sort of things, that we had growing up, umm…it made me respect diversity more (Participant 3).

This made students realise that they would like their role as Educational Psychologists to benefit individuals who have socio-economic difficulties:

*It's just a personal thing, I've always just wanted to do it and that's actually one of the reasons I am studying this, is that you see people on the street and living in poverty and in****** near where I leave and all those places and you want to help those people* (Participant 6).

 I also wanted to work with underprivileged people or clients (Participant 4).

▪ **Students gained insight into working with a different gender**

TABLE 4.10: DEFINITION, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY 'STUDENTS GAINED INSIGHT INTO WORKING WITH A DIFFERENT GENDER'

Definition	Students worked with adolescent boys during the practicum:
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'boys' and 'in my group' were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'girls' and 'female' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

To a limited extent, students expressed awareness of gender diversity during the community engagement practicum. Some students learnt how to work with adolescent boys. For some this was a new experience:

I also found it quite positive, I feel I only had a group of boys and it was really nice to see how they engaged in each and every activity that I gave them (Participant 4).

So after a while I got a group and guess what? All boys. But I just did what I came to do and when we started everything was fine. The boys in my group were amazing and sweet (Participant 6).

4.2.2   THEME 2: EXPERIENCES OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The students gained several skills during the practicum that contributed to their overall professional development as Educational Psychologists. Those professional skills include: gaining confidence in their ability to act as Educational Psychologists, a sense of professional accomplishment and the accompanying satisfaction, coping with the unknown and enhanced skill at reflexive thinking in support of professional development.

TABLE 4.11:   DEFINITION, SUBTHEMES, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE THEME 'EXPERIENCES OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT'

Definition	The community engagement practicum provided the students the opportunity to gain experiences in their professional development:
Subthemes	Two themes emerged, namely, acquired Educational Psychology skills and insight into the professional role.
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'self-confidence,' 'make a difference,' 'comfort zone,' and 'adaptable' were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'unsure,' 'uncomfortable,' and 'difficulty with flexibility' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

4.2.2.1   **Subtheme 2.1: Acquired educational psychology skills**

The skills that were acquired by the students during the community engagement practicum will now be discussed.

▪   **Students gained confidence in their abilities as Educational Psychologists**

TABLE 4.12:   DEFINITION, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY 'STUDENTS GAINED CONFIDENCE IN THEIR ABILITIES AS EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS'

Definition	Students felt confident in their abilities as Educational Psychologists:
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'confidence' and 'realised' were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'ability to work with groups' and 'working with diversity' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

Students expressed that they felt more confident as Educational Psychologists-in-training to apply what they had learnt in the classroom situation in a real life context:

So it helped me to gain that confidence to see what I learned here, I can actually apply there (Participant 8).

I got more self-confidence (Participant 6).

When I got there I actually realised, I got more self-confidence (Participant 6).

Today was a positive experience and I feel that I have more confidence in myself (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 7).

▪ **Students experience a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment**

TABLE 4.13:   DEFINITION, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY 'STUDENTS EXPERIENCE A SENSE OF SATISFACTION AND ACCOMPLISHMENT'

Definition	Students experienced feelings of satisfaction and accomplishment:
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'make a difference' and 'personally enriching' were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'group skills' and 'culturally aware' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

Students' felt that the practicum gave them the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of the learners and they found this to be personally enriching:

Community engagement is personally enriching because why I wanted to study this is so that I can make a difference in the lives of people who can't really help themselves, who are stuck, who don't have the resources. It's personally enriching to know that you are making a difference in the lives of those who may not have as much as other people (Participant 4).

I experienced it very positively, and I actually feel that I did make a difference, even if the time was short; I got through most of my activities (Participant 8).

He had actually mobilised the assets that we had identified and he had found a part time job. So he was on his way and he was so excited that he could actually do this and I think that one experience, that one thing made the whole visit worthwhile (Participant 3).

So I think it must have made a difference, even in a small way just to feel a bit more positive about yourself (Participant 4).

It made me feel that I am needed here and that I can make a difference in their lives (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 7).

▪ **Students had to adapt to the unknown during the practicum**

TABLE 4.14: DEFINITION, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY 'STUDENTS HAD TO ADAPT TO THE UNKNOWN DURING THE PRACTICUM'

Definition	Students had to cope with the unknown during the practicum:
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'expect,' 'prepare,' and 'threw me off' were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'anticipate' and 'uncertainty' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

Bender *et al*. (2006) state that community engagement activities should involve the orientation of students before they go into the community. The students expressed that at times it was difficult for them as they were unsure of what to expect and they were unsure of what was expected of them at the practicum site:

I felt totally overwhelmed by this assignment. I did not know what to expect! (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 2).

I didn't know what to expect (Participant 2).

Not knowing group sizes, how much do you prepare for, what do you take with (Participant 3).

The fact that there was different numbers all the time, that threw me off because I like the structure, I started with six and then we get everything done and then the next time, I got thirteen, now I am building on my previous visit and with the others, it sort of doesn't make sense for them (Participant 5).

Those expressions by the students seem to indicate that the practicum assisted them to realise that they can be adaptable and flexible in new situations:

It challenged me because I am a very structured person, so the personal growth is to go into a situation and see what you get and be flexible with what you get and just to calm down and be flexible (Participant 2).

I was able to think on my feet, how I was adaptable (Participant 3).

Similarly, students expressed that the practicum challenged their comfort zones and made them realise that they could work under pressure:

Then it took me out of my comfort zone and showed me this different context (Participant 5).

And then also to work under pressure and in unexpected environments or experiences (Participant 6).

▪   **Students' reflexivity was enhanced**

The key to effective reflection during community engagement is continuity (Eyler, 2002). Eyler (2002) continues to state that observations have to be continually processed, challenged, and connected with other information. The students continually reflected throughout the practicum, this challenged them to reflect on their skills as well as their belief systems.

TABLE 4.15:   **DEFINITION, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY 'STUDENTS'**
REFLEXIVITY WAS ENHANCED'

Definition	Reflexivity enhanced professional development:
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'second time,' 'reflect back,' and 'always been' were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'working with different age groups' and 'language barriers' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

Students reflected during the practicum on their skills and abilities:

Realised when I reflected back, the only thing that the reflections did help me with, was when I reflected back I realised that the things I had done and how I was able to think on my feet, how I was adaptable, and those are the things I thought I wasn't but they made me aware that I could do these things (Participant 3).

Overall, it was a very positive experience, there was some negative stuff like some of them said, the fact that I feel if we had a more structured way to do the initial planning, your actual therapy would be better, because the second time, when I got there or after the first time when you actually go through your stuff, you see oh, but I should have done this or I could have done that (Participant 6).

Then when I reflect back, I actually saw that, that is how I have always been functioning, but I never realised it until there and it was pointed out, so that was a growth point (Participant 6).

Each student's belief system and ideals seemed to have been challenged during the practicum:

I don't know but I guess some of the ideals that I had, some of the things that I used to think were challenged a bit and I guess that will eventually lead to personal growth (Participant 1).

A lot of things that I think about, culture, people, interacting with people, and a lot of that was challenged. It linked with the first thing that I said with the first question, about for me really the time issue and the amount of time that we spent there and the sustainability of the whole thing, that's what got questioned in mind, because we were always told that no matter what we do with the child, you always make a difference and I still feel that experience for me at *******, really challenged that ideal (Participant 1).

Also, the way in which I view obstacles for example because it puts in perspective what you consider an obstacle and what they may consider an obstacle (Participant 8).

The students also realised that each individual has their own perspective and that different perspectives need to be taken into consideration when working with clients:

You have to know that everybody has different perspectives (Participant 5).

You have to know that everybody has different perspectives, it's not to say that they are not happy, you're not going there to help them, you're going to empower them, you have to find out what do they want, not what do you want them to want. You want to see what they really need and what they want because they might be really happy, they don't need a car, a computer, or this or that, you have to find out what they really want and then help them with that, to reach their own goals, not your goals (Participant 5).

4.2.2.2   Subtheme 2.2: Insight into professional roles

Students gained insights and awareness into their role as an Educational Psychologist.

▪   **Students formed partnerships**

TABLE 4.16:   DEFINITION, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY 'STUDENTS FORMED PARTNERSHIPS'

Definition	Partnerships were formed between students and educators:
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'educators,' 'peers,' and 'supervisors' were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'facilitator,' 'mentor,' and 'peer-supervision' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

PLATE 4.4: **A STUDENT FORMING PARTNERSHIPS WITH EDUCATORS FROM THE SCHOOL**

The scope of the module requires students to be able to supervise, hence the exposure to various supervision roles (Ebersöhn, 2009). The photograph illustrates a student engaging with educators from the school, thereby forming partnerships and getting exposure to various supervision roles. Pillay (2007) states that psychologists need to be trained to interact with a variety of stakeholders. Psychologists need to be trained to initiate and maintain contact and networks with community members and organisations, civic structures, local government and religious organisations. Such collaborations and networks could be used when in engaging in mass intervention, which is already manifesting in South Africa. The students expressed that participating with educators during assessment and intervention could have broadened the significance of the practicum:

I think that the educator-psychologist collaboration and relationship is an area of concern that needs further investigation and development (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 3).

But I also want to work with the educators as well (Participant 7).

Involve the teachers maybe, so we also thought of maybe doing a programme that is set and that the teachers can go through with (Participant 5).

I think for anybody, for us, I would like to see therapy in action and I think anybody in a career would like to see somebody else doing it in a different way and it just sparks off your own ideas, so I think that will be a good idea to involve the educators as well (Participant 5).

I feel it would have been beneficial if we had more time with the educators and could have actually collaborated and facilitated with them, in possibly a group situation, on how their ideas could be implemented and sustained (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 3).

PLATE 4.5: STUDENTS TAKING PART IN A DEBRIEFING SESSION WITH THEIR SUPERVISOR

The photograph portrays students taking part in discussions and debriefing sessions with their fellow students and supervisor after their session at the school. That involved talking about their achievements and challenges of the day. In addition, students exchanged ideas and information on how to overcome certain challenges and as a result students felt that they learnt from each other during the practicum:

Another positive thing for me was learning from each other, seeing what other people were doing and it just sparked of a lot of ideas because everybody was doing things different and that was the positive side (Participant 5).

Students' expressed that the practicum enhanced peer relationships:

I really enjoyed getting to know the other students a bit better. They are really nice and I believe that some of these newly found friendships will continue even after our studies have been completed. It was wonderful how well we worked together as a team (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 4).

Our MEd group also learned a lot about each other. Without their support and caring natures it might have been a different experience all together (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 6).

▪ **Students' expressed perceptions of an 'ideal' and 'real' role of an Educational Psychologist**

TABLE 4.17: DEFINITION, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY 'STUDENTS EXPRESSED PERCEPTIONS OF AN 'IDEAL' AND 'REAL' ROLE OF AN EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST'

Definition	Students were made aware of the role required of the Educational Psychologist in the 'real world':
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'scopes,' 'office,' and 'South African context' were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'encompass' and 'community' were not considered part of

	this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

Engelbrecht (2004) notes that the scope of Educational Psychologists requires a shift from the traditional child-deficit, medical approach towards an ecological and multi-level systems approach. Educational psychologists must now not only be prepared to intervene on an individual level but also on a systems level, to implement and evaluate preventative programmes. In those efforts they should conduct ecologically and systemically valid assessments and interventions, to promote positive learning environments within which learners and educators from diverse backgrounds have equal access to effective educational psychological support. The realisation of their changing scope of practice was expressed by the students through the following quotes:

I think the personal growth was when I realised for the first time, really realised, that educational psychologist is more than just an office practice (Participant 5).

I think community engagement should definitely be in our scopes, I think it is important for especially… in the South African context. As we said, there is so much need and so little resources in terms of professionals (Participant 8).

I have realised during our visit that the field of psychology is far more than assessments, therapy and writing reports. Our services are not only for clients who can afford our service (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 5).[4]

The students expressed that the practicum gave them the opportunity to experience real life situations within the South African context, outside of the comfort of the training centre at the university:

And what I also gained professionally, I think was a lot of these things is reality when you're doing community work, a lot of our complaints are actually a reality, and you are going to get this everywhere (Participant 8).

The students expressed their frustrations about people's lack of knowledge of the role of Educational Psychologists and expressed the need to educate people about their role and skill:

I think we need to get out there, we cannot sit in an office and expect people to come to us for help and I think knowledge is important here, we need to make people aware of our skills (Participant 2).

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[4]   Participant 5's reflective journal was translated from Afrikaans to English.

The students expressed the importance of working systematically with people at all times and to also work from an asset-based approach. Therefore, when working with a client, partners in various systems were taken into consideration and mobilised during the implementation of interventions:

Scope of practice, I really feel passionately about the fact that it has to be systemic (Participant 3).

The scope is to mobilise, and to identify first of all and to mobilise assets for children, I think that's very important to work with the systemic approach, in which you have to change their surroundings and also mobilise assets within their environment (Participant 5).

4.2.3   THEME 3: INTEGRATION OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

Theme 3 relates to how students applied theories during the practicum. Specific theories include the asset-based approach, positive psychology as well as the eco-systemic approach.

TABLE 4.18:   DEFINITION, SUBTHEMES, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE THEME 'INTEGRATION OF THEORY AND PRACTICE '

Definition	This encompasses the students' experiences of theory application during the practicum:
Subthemes	The subthemes entail personal experiences of theory application and the theories applied during practicum.
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'theoretical framework,' 'asset-based approach,' and 'positive psychology' were considered descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'conceptual framework' and 'other theories' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

4.2.3.1   Subtheme 3.1: Personal experiences of theory application during practicum

The students felt that during their studies at the university the interaction with many of their lecturers was from a medical model point of view. However, the practicum was different in that the asset-based approach and positive psychology governed the interactions between the lecturer and the students. The students expressed that the lecturer was interacting with them positively, and also identified assets within them:

The theoretical framework that we go in with, actually in a way governed our interactions with each other and our interactions with the lecturers as well. Cos despite the fact that this department claims that they work from an asset-based and a positive psychological framework with their students, I actually find that here it doesn't happen (Participant 1).

When they are dealing with us in terms of case discussions or even in class, the atmosphere is more medical model, where as with ****** it's the one place I actually think, the positive psychology and the asset-based approach actually came alive, from both sides. We weren't the only ones looking for assets in the children but the lectures themselves, looked for assets in us as well (Participant 1).

▪ **Understanding theory by means of application**

TABLE 4.19: DEFINITION, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY 'UNDERSTANDING THEORY BY MEANS OF APPLICATION'

Definition	Students understood theory better as the result of having opportunities to implement it in practice:
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'asset based approach,' 'engaging theory,' and 'practice' were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'communication,' 'sustainability,' and 'diversity' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

Pillay (2007) notes that community projects and fieldwork give trainee psychologists the necessary skills to work with communities, as it gives them the opportunity to reach out to people in the community, while simultaneously gaining experience in testing what they learn. That also provides them with the opportunity of testing theory in practical situations. The students were given opportunities to test out theories during the practicum:

I planned an activity without really linking it theoretically and then later on, it might be days later when the activities are actually done and you are discussing it with someone, then it finally clicks that oh! I've been working from this standpoint all the time but I just never got to a point where I've integrated the two, so theoretically and in terms of application of all the theories that we have learnt I think it's been great. Because you actually get a chance to see the theory in action (Participant 1).

I felt only asset-based and positive psychology I was able to put in practice (Participant 2).

The application of theory part, that was very good, I must say, because you know sometimes when you are engaging with theory, just from a learning or studying point of view (Participant 1).

Professionally, putting the theory into practice, I enjoyed working out the activities and then also afterwards seeing, oh! this is from Super or this is from Holland and we actually do it and we just need to (Participant 8).

- **Understanding Community Engagement as Educational Psychologists**

TABLE 4.20: DEFINITION, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY 'UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AS EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS'

Definition	Students discuss how they understood the term 'community engagement':
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'empower,' 'reciprocal,' and 'community' were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'asset-based,' 'eco-systemic,' and 'positive psychology' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

During the focus group session, the students were asked to give their own understanding of how they conceptualise the thought 'community engagement.' The following worldviews, perceptions and experiences were noted (Greeff, 2005). Community engagement involves identifying assets and barriers and mobilising the identified assets to develop the community as a whole:

It's engaging with the community in such a way that you bring in something to them and you also identify what they have and you use it to better them, to better the community and develop them (Participant 1).

And community engagement, as Participant 1 said you have to go into the community, engage with the community, identify assets, identify barriers, identify needs and use the assets to help overcome the barriers or needs (Participant 2).

PLATE 4.6: STUDENTS AND LEARNERS IMPLEMENTING THE ASSET-BASED APPROACH

As stated above, a part of the student understanding of community engagement is the importance of identifying assets. In the photograph above, learners are making asset-maps of themselves as individuals. Community engagement is a mutual experience in which the community and the student both gain from the experience. Therefore, it entails reciprocity between the two:

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My understanding, yes, to go in and empower them with their assets but it is a mutual experience for me, maybe because personally for me I felt that I had personal growth but I think you shouldn't go into the community thinking that you are going to teach them something, you should just go in with the thought of we are going to work together. We are going to learn together, new strategies to improve the functioning of this community (Participant 8).

Community engagement also entails collaboration with the community members. Engelbrecht (2004) states that development of collaborative teams within schools and communities will provide the full range of educational support services by pooling limited available professional and other resources, to make optimum use of them. Collaboration should be inclusive, encompassing educators, principals, administrators, parents, learners, community members and professional support personnel, and should focus on shared decision making in governance, planning, delivery and assessment in education. The following statements expressed the importance of collaboration:

So it really is collaboration, reciprocity and all of that and that's how I view community engagement (Participant 3).

The students expressed the need to involve the community members to encourage sustainable interventions at the school:

Sustainability is also very important, that's why I think you have to include all the community members, like we said we worked with the learners but if we could have worked with the teachers as well, maybe just one of the mornings to give a workshop, umm… just to include the teachers as well and they were included when we worked in our groups (Participant 8).

In the following quote, the student reiterates the above by using an analogy to describe the importance of sustainability:

I think the students should really focus on not just giving, sort of the saying that says, don't give them fish; teach them how to fish (Participant 5).

Psychologist trainees could be trained to focus on preventative rather than only curative interventions. Yet the students may possibly be exposed to various preventative strategies that they can employ within different contexts. Although it is essential for students to participate in prevention, their involvement in secondary and tertiary prevention is also important (Pillay, 2007). Prevention also seemed to be an important concept in the students understanding of community engagement, as they expressed the need for the implementation of programmes to prevent learners from engaging in negative experiences:

For example in the poor areas we have children that are exposed to drugs, and alcohol and all the negative stuff that you want to keep them away from; so by engaging them in sport activities, in community centres, with their families, with other people, with the school, you are actually keeping them away from that stuff. Where you can work towards that. So that's what community engagement is for (Participant 6).

In addition, the students expressed the need for similar practicums, to not only target children but whole communities:

I think through programmes you could develop the whole community not just the school or the children themselves (Participant 4).

Pillay and Kometsi (2007) discuss the importance of students working in communities to be critical of existing methods of psychology and many of the traditional approaches to psychological care, to mindfully adjust their techniques or learn more appropriate intervention methods. They stress that it is vital for students to understand the need to tailor approaches to suit the needs of their clients. Whilst implementing their assessments and intervention strategies the students realised that the standardised assessments and theories in current use by the university are not indigenous to the South African context. They, therefore, realised how important it is to adjust the theories and assessments to be indigenous to the South African context:

But we actually need to go in there and actually take our psychology and make it South African as well, because what is the point of learning about all these western instruments and everything else if you can't apply it to your own context (Participant 1).

Because that is South Africa, the reality, because we are such a small group, and in spite of that they focus on the western type of doing things, testing, and doing educational psychology and to me that was a real life experience, going into the real South African world and seeing that we need to adjust theories, practical's, tests and that. Then it took me out of my comfort zone and showed me this different context (Participant 5).

The assessment tools that I used to gather information were different from the traditional psychometric instruments that I would use while in Pretoria. I had to think outside the box, I had to be more creative, and make sure that the activities I had planned were going to be culturally friendly, so that during the course of the visit the learners would feel as ease with themselves and their abilities (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 1).

*That is why I feel that the ******* experience poses a lot of value for when we complete our studies, through this experience we learned to adapt our usual ways of assessing in order to find other ways that will provide us with the information that we need to develop an intervention* (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 4).

Through this experience I have realised that there are other ways of assessing learners effectively without making use of standardised measures (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 4).

I had no formal standardised tests to score or analyse at the end of the day, yet I was leaving with valuable knowledge (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 3).

4.2.3.2   Subtheme 3.2: Theories applied during the practicum

Students discussed their experiences of implementing acquired theories to real life situations. The students referred specifically to the asset-based approach, positive psychology and eco-systemic theories.

▪   **Asset-Based Approach applied during interventions**

TABLE 4.21:   DEFINITION, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY 'ASSET-BASED APPROACH APPLIED IN INTERVENTIONS'

Definition	The asset-based approach was applied during the interventions:
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'positive' and 'assets' were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'community engagement,' 'students,' 'personal development,' and 'positive psychology' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

Students integrated theories in developing and implementing their interventions with the learners. Part of the intervention by the students was to facilitate the learners' abilities to identify and mobilise assets in their environments, so as to use them in overcoming barriers in their lives:

And I think us going and just picking out the assets and the positive stuff was a big difference for them. I think they know themselves better in a sense, just focusing on their skills (Participant 5).

He had actually mobilised the assets that we had identified and he had found a part time job. So he was on his way and he was so excited that he could actually do this and I think that one experience, that one thing made the whole visit worthwhile (Participant 3).

In a sense, that showing them and pointing out their own assets (Participant 5).

Do something with mapping and to look for assets, to look at something and the asset jumps out, instead of the deficits (Participant 5).

The photograph below illustrates learners mapping out their assets. The students were encouraged to use the asset-based approach and positive psychology in their interventions and interactions with the learners. The students focused on finding assets within the learners and their environment.

PLATE 4.7: STUDENTS PUT THEORY INTO PRACTICE BY IMPLEMENTING THEORY IN THEIR INTERVENTIONS WITH THE LEARNERS

▪ **Students' realisation of the role of the Asset-Based Approach in their personal life**

TABLE 4.22: DEFINITION, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY 'STUDENTS' REALISATION OF THE ROLE OF THE ASSET-BASED APPROACH IN THEIR PERSONAL LIFE'

Definition	Students experienced the asset-based approach in their personal lives:
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'showed me' and 'overcome' were considered descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'learners implementing the asset-based approach' and 'learners implementing positive psychology' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

During the practicum the students not only identified assets for their group of learners but also identified and mobilised assets within themselves which they could use upon completing the practicum:

It was a barrier at first for me, and then I borrowed Participant 7's dictionary, and the second time I got the dictionary, the words, everything and it showed me how to overcome a barrier by using an asset (Participant 7).

I discovered strengths about myself and feel that it helped me grow as an Educational Psychologist and as a person (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 3).

▪ **Understanding Positive Psychology as Educational-Psychologists-in-training**

TABLE 4.23: DEFINITION, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY 'UNDERSTANDING POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AS EDUCATIONAL-PSYCHOLOGISTS-IN-TRAINING'

Definition	How students understood positive psychology during training:
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'hope,' 'optimism,' 'uplift,' and 'resilience' were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'assets' and 'relationships' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between these, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

The students' experienced positive psychology constructs in their engagement in a 'real life' setting and, as a result, one student expressed how her belief in the positive psychology approach was validated:

You know there are people that are struggling and yet they can make things work and they keep looking for the positives and it sort of made me a firm believer of positive psychology, basically that a positive frame of mind and hope and optimism, sort of increase resiliency and then leads to basically, an improved chance of success (Participant 3).

The students experienced the influences of positive psychology in their lives and in the learners' lives:

I thought that many of them have lost family members, which was the case, and I was thinking how resilient they must be to come to school despite hardships (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 7).

And actually it puts you in a positive frame of mind because you have to deliberately search and look and be on the lookout for positive things, so actually, instead of problems, that actually makes you to uplift yourself as well because your busy with positive things (Participant 7).

It just showed me that I could really see resilience that everybody talks about, I could really see it there because there were orphans, and their parents died of AIDS, they probably had AIDS, all of those kinds of things and still they came to school (Participant 8).

My "AHA!" moment during this visit was when I realised how positive and optimistic the children were about their futures, despite the hardships and barriers they were experiencing. I believe that this internal asset they possess can only contribute to their future development (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 3).

▪ **Other theories applied as Educational Psychologists-in-training**

TABLE 4.24: DEFINITION, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY 'OTHER THEORIES APPLIED AS EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS-IN-TRAINING'

Definition	Students implemented other theories during the practicum, such as the eco-systemic approach:
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'systems,' 'levels,' and 'community' were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'assets,' 'positive traits,' and 'resources' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between these, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

In relation to the eco-systemic approach, the students expressed that that approach entails working with all the systems in the child's life, such as the school, other professionals and the community in general:

It's working ecosystemically, so that actually means working with all the aspects and systems that influence on the child and the family, it's the school, other professionals, community (Participant 6).

4.2.4 THEME 4: EXPERIENCES RELATED TO STRUCTURING A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRACTICUM

The students discussed how they experienced the structure of the community engagement practicum.

TABLE 4.25: DEFINITION, SUBTHEMES, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE THEME 'EXPERIENCES RELATED TO STRUCTURING A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRACTICUM'

Definition	Students experiences of the structure of the community engagement practicum:
Subthemes	The two themes indicated are students recommendations regarding challenges they experienced and students experiences of feedback
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'structure,' 'expect,' and 'guidance' were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'community,' 'adapt,' and 'flexibility' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

4.2.4.1 Subtheme 4.1: Students' recommendations regarding challenges they experienced

Students discuss various aspects related to the structure of the community engagement practicum which impacted on their experiences.

▪ **A need for briefing prior to the community engagement practicum**

TABLE 4.26: DEFINITION, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY 'A NEED FOR BRIEFING PRIOR TO THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRACTICUM'

Definition	Students required a community engagement format to communicate expectations of the practicum:
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'plan,' 'restructured,' and 'informed' were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'unplanned' and 'knowledgeable' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

It seems that the students experienced a need for prior information with regard to the community engagement activity. More specifically, they wanted to be informed about the environment they would work in, their clients' background information, as well as information on planning and implementing their interventions. The students emphasised that they did not know what to expect during the practicum at the secondary school. Most of the students expressed that they would have benefited from background information on the environment of the school and background information of the learners:

Yeah, it was very difficult to plan, especially because you didn't know how big your group was going to be (Participant 8).

There were a lot of hindrances; I wouldn't say negative things, not knowing group sizes, how much do you prepare for? What do you take with? (Participant 3).

I also don't think that we knew what to expect, in the sense of what do you have to plan, what is available. The big thing for me was not knowing what level the children were on (Participant 5).

For me to sum it up, ******* is a great experience, I just think it needs to be restructured and reworked a bit, in terms of time (Participant 1).

But I think one of the main challenges was that I didn't know what to expect and there was little structure given to us and I like working with structure and I think that maybe if they could show the following year students, a little video clip of us being there, just for them to see, this is what the school looks like, there is actually tables and chairs, because we weren't even informed about things like that, and that makes a big difference (Participant 8).

Which I think if you had a bit more guidance on what to expect and what sort of activities to plan, a bit more background with regards to the learners, that planning could have been better (Participant 6).

▪ **Students' recommendations regarding evaluating the impact, effectiveness and significance of their practicum contributions**

TABLE 4.27: DEFINITION, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY 'STUDENTS' RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING EVALUATING THE IMPACT, EFFECTIVENESS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THEIR PRACTICUM CONTRIBUTIONS'

Definition	Students were aware of the importance of evaluating the community engagement practicum:
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'follow-up' and 'change' were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'evaluation,' 'sustainability,' and 'informed' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between these, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

The students felt that their role within practicum did possibly not lead to sustainable outcomes for the learners. They expressed their desire to evaluate the effectiveness of their work done at the practicum. They seemed to view 'effectiveness' in terms of having a follow-up to the practicum, making the practicum sustainable and the knowledge of 'seeing' change in their learners' lives at that school:

I think it's important also as part of the definition to follow up (Participant 8).

The other thing is that I also feel the experiences were in a certain sense negative because I like the more sustainable type of thing, I like follow-ups and I am honest with you. I would like to go back, go back there, and see what has changed. I know that we are not there to make changes but I want to see how they progressed (Participant 7).

Consequently, some of the students implemented strategies to enhance sustainability in their interventions:

I gave the life orientation teacher a copy and really hope that he will incorporate it into his class (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 4).

When planning the logistics of community engagement activities Bender *et al*. (2006) state that it is important to budget for that activity. An important consideration is to find out how much money you are going to need and from where you will access the funding. One participant emphasised that she had spent too much money on the practicum and would have liked some financial support from the university.

Maybe they can provide the students also with a better financial support for their media because I spent really lots of money on my media, and I think that's the biggest negative for me, was spending lots of money (Participant 4).

▪ **Student recommendations regarding reflexivity**

TABLE 4.28: DEFINITION, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY 'STUDENTS' RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING REFLEXIVITY'

Definition	Reflection was encouraged during the practicum through reflective journals and reflective dialogue:
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'reflective journals,' 'deeper,' and 'taught' were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'monitored' and 'easily reflected' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experiential response.

Reflection is critical in community engagement activities. Dunbar-Krige (2007) cited in Petersen, Dunbar-Krige and Fritz (2008) states that reflection can support meaningful learning and greater integration between theory and practice, however it is important that students are given clear and specific guidelines on how to reflect. The students, on the whole, preferred oral rather than written reflection. The students expressed that they did not enjoy writing in their reflective journals, as they were unsure of what was expected of them in their reflective writing:

Yes and then professional growth, it's always difficult for me to do reflection, it's difficult because no one has taught us to do reflective journals and stuff, and they always ask us to go deeper, just go deeper and deeper, but what is deeper? (Participant 2).

Because previous times in my first years' reflection, I had a very negative experience, to me I experienced it as no guidance was given, we were said to do it anyway (Participant 5).

I found it absolutely a waste of my time because I don't know how to do it, I just write whatever I am doing, I don't even know if it is correct (Participant 6).

The students preferred the reflective dialogue during the implementation of interventions and during debriefing sessions, as they preferred this outlet of expressing themselves:

I actually, like that very much, initially I thought I don't want to do this reflecting together but actually that was a part of the reflective session, that helped me the most, which I learnt the most from, but the writing I found it absolutely a waste of my time because I don't know how to do it, I just write whatever I am doing, I don't even

know if it is correct. But the talking to my fellow students and talking to *******, that really helped me (Participant 6).

I actually, like that very much, initially I thought I don't want to do this reflecting together but actually that was a part of the reflective session, that helped me the most (Participant 6).

Just to get to talk about how it felt and what you expected (Participant 6).

The reflective dialogue also presented an opportunity for the students to see whether they were on the right track, as well as to grasp another opinion on their experiences:

Also to see whether you are on the right track, if what you are doing is actually worthwhile, and then someone says, haven't you thought about that, and it sets your thoughts on… you thinking further, so you're actually reflecting. While when I am writing, I am just writing down, now I am actually reflecting and someone is giving me feedback and you can go on (Participant 6).

And actually it also helped me to put a lot of things in perspective, when I, one time I said I felt that my group is very quiet and very shy and I am wondering if they are even enjoying this and then someone else said, yeah but they look so engaged, you know, so it's just to take a step back and listen to someone else's perspective from outside because the way you experience it, might not be the way it's actually happening, it's just the way it feels to you because you expected maybe a different reaction (Participant 8).

The reflective dialogue was an uncomfortable experience for some students because the facilitator would take down notes while they were talking:

The facilitator was writing things down; it was almost like grading how was my reflection (Participant 3).

The formal sort of seat down at the end of the evening that actually made me a bit uncomfortable (Participant 3).

However, for another student the writing down of comments by lecturers during her reflective dialogue made her comfortable:

That's just again an individual difference because I didn't experience it like that at all. But in more ways, it made me feel safe and comfortable (Participant 6).

One students' experience of peer reflection was positive to the extent that she expressed confidence to reflect in the absence of a facilitator:

We didn't really need a facilitator during reflection sessions, because we were reflecting all the time in any case. You know we were sharing our fears and we were sharing our ideas. On the way back we were sharing what happened, so in a way we were already reflecting and debriefing and that for me helped (Participant 3).

4.2.4.2 Subtheme 4.2: Students' experiences of feedback

▪ **Students' experiences of feedback received during reflective dialogue**

TABLE 4.29: DEFINITION, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY 'STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF FEEDBACK RECEIVED DURING REFLECTIVE DIALOGUE'

Definition	How students experienced the feedback during the reflective dialogue:
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'positive experience,' 'constructive,' and 'comfortable' were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'uncomfortable' and 'unstructured' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

The reflective dialogue seemed to create a positive space for lecturer-student feedback, which students similarly experienced as being positive:

To me it was the first positive experience I had with reflecting, and it was also the first time that we were given so much positive and building feedback from the lecturer (Participant 5).

It was building and it was constructive and it guided you and they actually told you what you did right and they said that you could actually do something (Participant 5).

It also helps you to identify your own strengths because the people and the feedback you get and you say ok, I am actually good at this, but this is a strength (Participant 6).

I felt really satisfied you know, after I got the feedback, then I felt much more comfortable and much more relaxed, you know like I am fine, I am not this horrible useless me (Participant 7).

▪ **Feedback from learners during interactions**

TABLE 4.30: DEFINITION, INDICATORS, EXCLUSIONS AND EXCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE CATEGORY 'FEEDBACK FROM LEARNERS DURING INTERACTIONS'

Definition	Students received feedback from the learners they were working with:
Indicators	All the instances in the data where participants made use of phrases such as 'respectful,' 'quiet,' and 'activities' were considered to be descriptive of this theme.
Exclusions	Instances where the participants referred to 'active,' 'engaged,' and 'games' were not considered part of this theme. Although there are similarities between those, they are separated for the purpose of this study.
Exceptions	This refers to responses where one or more participants indicated opposite responses to that of the

	majority of participants. It may also indicate that they merely did not express having had that particular experience.

Most of the students experienced positive interactions with their group of learners and experienced the learners as respectful, shy and quiet:

I experienced the group as very respectful, so I had a very quiet, shy, respectful group (Participant 8).

My group seems to be very quiet and they only spoke when I asked them questions (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 4).

The students expressed that the learners enjoyed their activities. The learners were also keen to take part in the activities:

When we did the game "working towards a goal" where they had to break the tower they had so much fun. We laughed and cheered and just got closer together (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 6).

The energy that the learners had, the excitement and eagerness to do activities and worksheets and to learn more about themselves (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 1).

I experienced the learners as eager, insightful and very willing to engage in all the activities (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 3).

They participated fully and gave it their all (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 4).

At times however, it seemed the learners preferred active rather than passive activities:

I don't feel that the children enjoyed today's activities as much as yesterdays. I think this could be because most of today's activities were mostly pen and paper based and lacked the playful/physical nature of game based activities (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 3).

The learners showed their gratitude to the students for their visit to their school. Extracts from the reflective journals reflect the above statement:

They expressed their appreciation for all that I had done (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 1).

The last day they hugged me and sang a song goodbye. They gave me some photos of themselves as a goodbye present (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 2).

When I was walking away after greeting them the one boy ******, came to me and thanked me for what I have done for them and that was such a special moment for me. He asked if he could give me a hug and I said yes

and then –chaos- everybody was giving hugs, even learners I did not know- it was great fun (Extract from reflective journal of Participant 6).

4.3   CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it seems that the students had both positive and negative experiences from the practicum. Some of the positive experiences included: learning to be flexible and adapting to new environments, learning from their fellow colleagues and sharing ideas with each other, appreciating diversity in South Africa and learning to work with different race groups and learning to work with language barriers. Furthermore, the reflective dialogue was more productive than the writing in the reflective journals, as most of the students felt more comfortable talking than writing about their experiences.

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CHAPTER 5
RESEARCH OVERVIEW AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1   INTRODUCTION

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the results of this study, which are then compared with the available literature related to the students' experiences of community engagement in an Educational Psychology practicum. Next, the findings of this study are discussed, after which the specific research questions are addressed. The limitations of this study are then addressed and, lastly, recommendations are made for further research, practice and training.

5.2   DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings indicate that experiential learning took place during the community engagement practicum. This is shown through a discussion of the four learning modes of Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning as well as five propositions about learning from experience (Boud *et al*., 1993), which is discussed in Figure 5.1 (p.89).

Figure 5.1 is a presentation of how Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning was evident during the practicum at the secondary school in Mpumalanga. The four learning modes of experiential learning were shown through different activities undertaken during the practicum. *Concrete experience* was demonstrated through the students getting direct practical experience during the practicum, as educational psychologists-in-training. This was evident in the students engaging with the learners through various activities, engaging with their peers and the formation of partnerships with the educators at the school. Indicators of *active experimentation* were evident through the following activities; students accumulated knowledge on how to implement future community engagement activities, such as: the importance of having the collaboration of educators and community members in future community engagement activities, the importance of creating sustainable community engagement activities, and ensuring that the community engagement activities are evaluated in the future so that better interventions are planned. In addition, the practicum made them aware of what their role as future Educational Psychologists will be in the future and the students also realised the importance of getting involved in future community engagement activities. *Abstract conceptualization* was shown through the ability of the students to relate theories and previously acquired knowledge learnt in the classroom situation to the practicum. That involved the students being able to apply theories, such as the asset-based approach and positive psychology, to their planned assessments and interventions, the utilisation of the theories in their interactions with others and practising skills learnt in the classroom within the school-community. Finally, students engaging with reflective dialogue and writing in their reflective journals depicts that *reflective observation* occurred during the practicum.

Active experimentation is when the learner plans how to test a theory or model for a forthcoming experience (Healey & Jenkins, 2000). The students' new understanding of what community engagement entails indicated active experimentation. In addition, students discussed the importance of collaboration, sustainability, prevention and evaluation in future community engagement activities. Students were made aware of an 'ideal' and 'real' role of an educational psychologist and as a result, students planned that, for forthcoming experiences they would get involved in future community engagement activities so as to reach more people. Students also recommended that future community engagement activities required structuring and an orientation process prior to the community engagement activity.

The learning mode of **concrete experience** emphasises the importance of direct practical experience. This practicum gave the students an opportunity to actively experience an activity (Healey & Jenkins, 2000; Bender *et al.*, 2006). Concrete experience, was evident by the students actively engaging with the learners during their various activities, the students forming partnerships with the educators and interacting with their peers.

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle indicates that experiential learning took place during the community engagement practicum.

Abstract conceptualization was indicated by the students' ability to tie course-related and other previously acquired knowledge and theories to describe the practicum experience from a conceptual rather than a descriptive perspective (Collier & Williams, 2005). This was indicated by the students' experiences of applying theories in their assessments and interventions, their ability to understand theories as the result of implementing it in practice and at times even integrating theories from other modules in the programme such as the eco-systemic theory. Abstract conceptualization was also illustrated by the students' ability to put into practice the skills that they had learned in the classroom environment as Educational Psychologists.

Reflective observation *was* indicated by the students' experiences of writing in the reflective journal, participating in the reflective dialogue and the occurrence of reflexivity during the practicum. Students were encouraged to consciously reflect on the practicum in their reflective journals and during reflective dialogue after each session at the secondary school. In addition, some students indicated that they were reflecting during the practicum by themselves (reflexivity) and as a result learned about themselves and how to enhance and adapt their skills whilst the practicum was still in session. This indicates that students were reflecting on their experiences and during their experiences, hence it can be assumed that the learning experience at the practicum enriched their knowledge as deep and effective learning occurs when new knowledge is processed within a reflective process (Brockbank *et al.*, 2002).

FIGURE 5.1: KOLB'S (1984) EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE DEPICTING THAT EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING TOOK PLACE DURING THE PRACTICUM

In addition, five propositions about learning from experience (Boud *et al*., 1993) were evident during the practicum. The first proposition states that ***experience is the foundation of, and the stimulus for learning***. That shows that learning in isolation from experience is meaningless, as learning builds on and flows from learning (Boud *et al*., 1993). During the community engagement practicum, through putting the asset-based approach and positive psychology theory into practice, students became active participants in their own learning process. In addition, they had to implement assessments and intervention strategies, whilst engaging with the learners at the school. As a result, most of the students expressed that the practicum was a learning experience, as they were able to apply their theoretical knowledge to a real life context.

The second proposition states that ***learners actively construct their experience.*** Each student experienced certain aspects of the practicum as being positive and some as being negative. For example, whereas the majority of students preferred engaging in reflective dialogue together with their supervisor, one student mentioned that she preferred reflecting while on her own. That indicates that students actively construct their own experiences and have their own expectations, knowledge, attitudes, and emotions. The students' individual experiences influence their interpretation of the experience and their construction of what they experience (Boud *et al*., 1993).

The third proposition emphasises that ***learning is a holistic process*** (Boud *et al*., 1993). The holistic learning achieved by the students was evidenced in the entries made in their reflective journals. They reflected on aspects such as the cognitive domain (their thought processes), their affective domain (how they were feeling), and the psychomotor domain (what actions they intended to take). Those different domains were also indicated in the discussions within the focus group interviews.

The fourth proposition focuses on ***learning as socially and culturally constructed***. Learning does not occur in isolation from social and cultural norms and values (Boud *et al*., 1993). The students did interact with learners

who were from different cultural backgrounds to their own. As evident from Theme 3, the students demonstrated awareness of the importance of utilising assessment measures that are culturally friendly or indigenous to the South African context.

The fifth proposition states that *learning is influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it occurs*. This proposition states that how we interpret experience is ultimately linked to how we view ourselves (Boud *et al.*, 1993). The way in which the students viewed themselves after the practicum was indicated in Theme 2, when students' expressed feeling more confident in their abilities and having feelings of satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment and, in addition, the students experienced the practicum as being personally enriching. Consequently, Boud *et al*. (1993) state that confidence is important for learning to occur during an experience, so that learners can make use of the information they gather from that experience.

5.3   CONCLUSION IN TERMS OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

5.3.1   HOW CAN KNOWLEDGE REGARDING STUDENT'S EXPERIENCES OF AN EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY PRACTICUM RELATING TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CONTRIBUTE TO EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY THEORY AND PRACTICE?

Firstly, students seem to benefit from greater intercultural competence. As a result of their experience some students reportedly acquired the competence to communicate in a different cultural context. To be culturally competent, a student must cultivate a *mindset* (analytical framework for understanding culture), a *skillset* (interpersonal and group skill for bridging differences) and a *heartset* (motivation and curiosity to explore cultural variables) (Reitenauer, Cress & Bennett, 2005). The students expressed that they want to work with people throughout the country, within the South African context. The specific module trained students to work in a context with people of diverse cultures, race and ethnicities.

Secondly, in terms of community engagement, students acquired group work competence, such as: facilitating the development of a group (which entails forming the group, storming, norming and performing), group cohesion (factors that encourage members to remain united and be committed to a group) and communication in groups (ensuring the contribution from all members of the group) (Collier & Voegele, 2005). In addition, students were exposed to a broader range of diversity than was the case at the training centre at the university. In this regard, students worked with children from different age groups, from different race groups and of different genders. The students expressed that they enjoyed the practicum as, through it, they realised they could reach more people. Thus acquiring group work competence meant that students reported having the capacity to reach out to people in similar rural community settings.

Thirdly, reflection is an important component to educational psychology practice. The students seemed to flourish when reflection was oral and facilitated in a strengths-based mode. Bender *et al*. (2006) state that regardless of

the form of reflection used, academic staff need to decide how to structure the reflection. The students expressed the need for a structured reflection process.

Finally, the students voiced that future community engagement activities would benefit from dialogue and briefing on the practicum beforehand. Orientation of students is crucial, as it informs them about their expected conduct at the community site (Bender *et al*., 2006). Orientation entails discussing aspects which include: risks and benefits of the practicum, skills required during the practicum and the involvement of students who had already completed the practicum as speakers during the orientation phase (Bender *et al*., 2006).

Therefore, Educational Psychology practice and theory need to focus on ensuring that the above information is disseminated to students and that students are trained to deal with the above during community engagement activities.

5.3.2 HOW CAN KNOWLEDGE REGARDING STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF AN EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY PRACTICUM RELATING TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CONTRIBUTE TO CURRICULAR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT THEORY AND PRACTICE?

This research has contributed to curricular community engagement theory and practice in various ways. The students expressed that their understanding of community engagement entails the following aspects:

- Community engagement theory involves identifying assets and barriers within a community (which in this study was the school-community), and then mobilising the identified assets to address barriers to the benefit of the community as a whole.

- Community engagement is a mutual activity in which the community and the student both gain from that activity or practice. Therefore, it entails reciprocity between the two constituents.

- Community engagement practice entails collaboration and partnerships with community members and other professionals, such as counselors, representatives of faith-based organisations, health workers, and social workers.

- Community engagement entails working with a broad spectrum of systems within the community (which in this study were the learners, parents, educators and other community systems).

- Community engagement also entails sustainability, prevention, intervention, and evaluation of the implemented programme.

Therefore, curricular community engagement practice and theory need to focus on ensuring that the above information is disseminated to students and that students are trained to deal with the above during community engagement activities.

5.3.3 How do students' experiences of an educational psychology practicum relate to the criteria for service-learning?

Findings of this study indicate that the reported experiences of the students signal some of the elements and characteristics of service-learning. As discussed in Chapter 2, within service-learning there are four essential criteria: Firstly, the service provided must be relevant and meaningful to the community, the students and the institution (Bender *et al*., 2006). Hence, the service provided to a community must be relevant and improve their quality of life as well as assist students to achieve academic module outcomes. In that regard, the practicum provided the students who participated in the study with opportunities to grow their professional skill and knowledge through the application of their talents and abilities in dealing with real community issues and real-world problems (Cress, 2005).

Secondly, the service-learning experience must ensure that student learning takes place during activities, learning strategies, assessment and, more specifically, that learning outcomes are attained (Bender *et al*., 2006). Through active participation during the practicum the students gained a better understanding of theories, such as the asset-based approach and positive psychology, and several skills, such as working with groups, different age groups, situational diversity and cultures.

Thirdly, service-learning must prepare students for active civic participation and social responsibility (Bender *et al*., 2006). The students stated that the community engagement practicum made them want to be actively involved in future community engagement activities. The students expressed a feeling that, as educational psychologists, it is their responsibility to ensure all people in the country had access to their services which, in future, needs be moulded to suit the South African context. In addition to that, they expressed that by working with groups and in communities, more people could have access to educational psychology services and, therefore, be reached.

Finally, students need to be given structured opportunities for reflection, to link the theory of the module with the service or practice in the community (Bender *et al*., 2006). During the practicum, students expressed appreciation for opportunities to engage in reflective dialogue and were required to maintain a written reflective journal, as part of their course work. The students expressed that the reflection process assisted them in challenging preconceived ideas, comparing initial goals and objectives with eventual outcomes, and assess what they had accomplished through that process (Cress, 2005).

By comparing the criteria of service-learning with the findings of this study, it becomes evident from the reported experiences of students that the community engagement practicum module 'Career Assessment and Counseling '(BOP 804) assists them to integrate the major components of service-learning.

In addition, many similarities existed between the students who participated in this study and students who had participated in service-learning activities in other research studies, as indicated in Chapter 2 (see par.2.5.2). *An increased awareness and understanding of diversity* was reported by the students, the educational psychologists-in-training expressed that the practicum gave them the opportunity to work with diverse cultures, races and ethnicities, and expressed that the experience assisted them in developing respect for diversity. *Academic development* was depicted by the students' increased ability to put theories into practice and apply skills that were learnt in the classroom environment in a real life setting. *Increased personal growth* was expressed by the students' feelings of self-confidence, accomplishment and satisfaction in their skills used during the community engagement practicum. *Engaging in future community engagement activities* was expressed by the majority of the students. Having engaged in the practicum they realised that by engaging in community engagement activities in the future they could offer their services to those who could not easily access their service and, at the same time, they would touch more people's lives. *An awareness of both civic and social responsibility* was depicted by students expressing that their engagement in the practicum made them aware of societal issues prevalent in the South African context. That experience made them realise the importance of offering their services to society at large, so that they could work towards resolving problems in society. Finally, *the importance of reflection on community engagement activities* was also noted by students. They stated that reflection, which made them more aware of their personal strengths, encouraged personal growth and that reflective dialogue assisted them as they learnt from the experiences of their peers.

> **CRITICAL REFLECTION OF RESEARCH PROCESS:**
>
> *On reflection, I see the value of the practicum at Mpumalanga, more now, than I did when I was a student. I feel that the literature review, gave me a better understanding of the theories that we had to apply during the practicum because I had to be fully immersed in the theories during the research process. Listening to the students and their experiences has changed my mindset and I have noticed that I am actually applying the asset-based theory and positive psychology in everyday situations, it may be looking for that positive individual trait inside myself or others or even implementing the theories in my interactions and interventions as an Educational Psychologist. I feel that I have become a more positive orientated individual and feel that I have overcome my previous needs-based approach thinking. This research process has allowed me to refine my practice as an educational psychologist. This research study made me realise that I want to be involved in future community engagement activities. I feel more comfortable now to go out and work within a community because this research study has given me, valuable knowledge and equipped me with the tools on how to approach the community and how community engagement activities should be planned and implemented. The students' experiences of the practicum and my supervisors' invaluable knowledge on various theories have contributed to my research journey and my personal and professional development and I feel the knowledge will assist in me contributing to society as an educational psychologist.*

5.4   POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

- The results of this study contribute to and extend existing literature on curricular community engagement by informing literature on students' experiences of community engagement in an Educational Psychology practicum. Similarly, the emerged insights give information on facilitating community engagement activities utilising experiential learning theory and reflective learning theory as the theoretical framework.

- The study provides literature on curricular community engagement from an educational psychology and student perspective.

- In addition, the study contributed to an expanding literature that mirrors a changed scope of practice for the training and practice of Educational Psychologists in South Africa. During the practicum, students identified a need for educational psychologists-in-training to work in real life contexts and with real community issues: in this case educational psychology experiences in a rural secondary school, as being representative of a working-life context for Educational Psychologists. This finding, therefore, indicates it would seem that involvement in community engagement activities are relevant and meaningful as part of in-time preparation of Educational Psychologists (curriculum responsiveness).

- This study indicated that students were interested and benefitted in taking part in community engagement activities. This finding therefore indicates the need for Educational Psychologists to be trained in community educational psychology and to practice within different communities. This type of training could form part of their practicum programme and a more progressive change to service-learning, thus equipping students to deal with a diversity of issues specific to the South African context to, consequently, become civically involved in society.

- The practicum contributed to identity construction within students as Educational Psychologists. The students expressed that they came to a fresh realisation of what their role of an Educational Psychologist in the South African context may entail, such as being able to work with diversity and being able to adapt assessments and theories to be culturally friendly.

- The practicum gave the students opportunities to integrate theories from other MEd Educational Psychology modules, i.e. systems theory. Therefore, theories on educational psychology are applied across the programme and not only applied in the Career Assessment and Counselling (BOP 804) module.

5.5   POSSIBLE LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In this section the limitations of this study are discussed:

- Firstly, this research was conducted with a limited number of participants. After the pilot focus group session with four participants, the final research study involved eight participants. Therefore, this study cannot be considered a representative sample of the South African population of students in Educational Psychology. However, as an interpretivist paradigm was employed, generalisable findings were not sought in this study but the aim was rather to richly describe one example of experiences of students who participated in an educational psychology practicum with components of service-learning.

- Secondly, this research study is limited because the research participants were not diverse and did not fully represent the various cultures of the population in South Africa. The results, therefore, are culture specific and do not reflect responses from other cultures about their experiences of the educational psychology practicum.

- Thirdly, this research study was limited in that the research participants were all female. The results, therefore, are gender specific and do not reflect possible responses from male students.

- Fourthly, the researcher experienced difficulty in finding literature that relates to community engagement and, more particularly, the experiences of students of Educational Psychology of a community engagement practicum. Most of the literature explored related to service-learning and to other disciplines, such as social workers, teachers, and nurses. Therefore, the literature control of this study was found to be a challenge and this may have limited the researcher's overview of the topic.

- Finally, the researcher's dual role as facilitator of the focus group and being a fellow colleague to the participants in this research could have limited the accuracy of the findings, due to her twofold focus.

5.6   RECOMMENDATIONS

Next, recommendations for practice, training and future research are discussed.

5.6.1   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CURRICULAR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

- Professionals working within communities could benefit from an understanding of community psychology, community engagement theories, experiential learning, reflective learning and community-engaged learning. Therefore, it is recommended that students are trained in modules that include service-learning, to practice community psychology theories and to add experiential, reflective and community-engaged learning theories into relevant curricula.

- Students seemed to benefit from an understanding of the needs, assets and issues prevalent in the communities they plan to work in and with. Therefore, it is recommended that the asset-based approach and positive psychology are integrated into educational psychology modules with

community engagement activities. In addition, the eco-systemic approach could also be added to the curriculum as through that the students learn the importance of looking at the whole system when working with and in communities.

- In Educational Psychology, where service-learning is integrated in the curriculum, students can benefit from orientation sessions in which essential and relevant issues that pertain to the curricular community engagement activity are discussed.

5.6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINING

- A need exists for institutions of higher education to encourage and support students of educational psychology in terms of their professional development by providing curriculum-related opportunities for active participation in and with communities.

- In every community engagement activity, experiential and reflective learning as well as service-learning can be utilised as tools to facilitate well organised and structured curricular community engagement activities.

5.6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Further research is required on integrating various community engagement activities in the curriculum of academic study programmes.

- In order to generalise the findings of this study, it is recommended that similar research be done with a larger sample of students in educational psychology from various educational institutions, with various types of curricular community engagement activities.

- Research is required on a study on male students' experiences of educational psychology community engagement activities.

- Research is required on students of Educational Psychology from various cultural backgrounds and their experiences of community engagement activities.

- Research is required to explore the effects of curricular community engagement activities on the academic performances and possible effects on the education of students of Educational Psychology.

- A study on the experiences of the stakeholders (e.g. the learners, educators and parent) of educational psychology practices conducted within their community, to explore the impact of such community engagement activities on the school-community and community members.

5.7 CLOSING REMARKS

The findings of this study indicate that community engagement activities can be an important component in the training and practice of Educational Psychologists, as there is a need in society for individuals to become civically responsible and practice their professional skill in a way that suits the South African context. It is, therefore, important that students of Educational Psychology are trained to know about, understand and deal with the diverse needs of their communities.

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