Educational psychology students' experiences of academic service learning in a higher education partnership with rural schools

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Educational psychology students' experiences of academic service learning in a higher education partnership with rural schools

by

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My sincere gratitude is hereby expressed:

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Ina-Mari du Toit (student number: 28448902), hereby declare that all the resources consulted are included in the reference list and that this study titled:

Educational psychology students' experiences of academic service learning in a higher education partnership with rural schools

is my original work. This dissertation was not previously submitted by me for any degree at another university.

_____

Ina-Mari du Toit

August 2016

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EDITING CERTIFICATE

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Date: 28/8/2016

This serves to confirm that the dissertation entitled:

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF ACADEMIC SERVICE LEARNING IN A HIGHER EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP WITH RURAL SCHOOLS

has been language edited on behalf of the author (Ina-Mari du Toit).

Nicol van Rensburg

Copy-editor

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CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	CLEARANCE NUMBER:	EP 07/02/04 Fly 15-005
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1. A signed personal declaration of responsibility
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this case study was to explore and describe educational psychology students' experiences of academic service learning (ASL) as part of a higher education- rural school partnership in order to inform knowledge on higher education community engagement. The Transformative Learning Theory framed the study by engaging students in an active meaning-making process of critical self-reflection and integration of experiences. Qualitative methodology was chosen as the preferred mode of inquiry which contributed to my insight and understanding of participants' subjective experiences of ASL. A constructivist epistemology guided dynamic interaction with participants, providing a platform for co-constructing knowledge generated based on participants' retrospective experiences. Seven cohorts of Master's students in Educational Psychology (2007 to 2013; n=22), who were involved in assessments and interventions at a rural school as part of their training at the University of Pretoria, were purposefully selected. Participants were, as far as possible, representative in terms of gender, age and cultural background. Qualitative data generation techniques (i.e. questionnaires and semi-structured interviews) were used to collect data, which were then thematically analysed by reporting on patterns across cohorts. The findings suggested that participants experienced the ASL practicum as an engaged scholarship that is socially transformative. The findings furthermore revealed that participants experienced ASL as an integral part of the educational psychology curriculum and a platform for initiating and developing professional identity. The ASL practicum experiences of participants are consistent across cohorts and similar to that experienced by other students in ASL programmes.

Key words:

- Academic service learning
- Transformative learning
- Educational psychology
- Student
- Experience
- Rural school
- Higher education
- Community engagement
- Partnership
- Qualitative methodology

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

---❖---

CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

---❖---

LITERATURE REVIEW

---❖---

---❖---

---❖---

CHAPTER 5   *Page*

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

---❖---

LIST OF TABLES, FIGURES AND PHOTOGRAPHS

Page

---❖---

---❖---

---❖---

---❖---

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

The study forms part of a broader NRF[1]-funded inquiry which aims to inform knowledge on higher education community engagement. In the case of the current study the focus is especially on the perspective of Academic Service Learning (ASL) students involved in a community engagement partnership with a remote secondary school. As this study forms part of a larger study that seeks to understand the perspectives of all relevant parties, it will add the student's point of view to the in-depth, multi-dimensional phenomenon of a higher education-rural school partnership that could potentially guide future partnerships of this nature. Also, it adds to the larger body of knowledge on higher education community engagement.

Second year Master's students in Educational Psychology at the University of Pretoria (UP) have been involved in a school-community partnership through an ASL intervention. Students were involved in the facilitation of group-based educational psychology activities in which Grade 9 learners gained opportunities to receive career guidance and emotional support. Eight cohorts of students have been providing these services at a rural school from 2006 to 2013 as part of the Flourishing Learner Youth (FLY) project.

The project is a longitudinal study embedded in a year-long clinical training module, namely Educational Psychological Practice (OPR 800), at the Centre for the Study of Resilience, UP, in collaboration with a secondary school in a rural area of Mpumalanga. A physical map is presented in Figure 1.1, showing the remote location of the rural school. The mutual aim of the FLY partnership is to provide a platform for integration between knowledge generation on resilience in rural schools, higher education community engagement and ASL, as well as on-going educational psychology services to learners. The knowledge generated from the FLY partnership is used for the mutual benefit of school-partners, students-in-training and collaborating researchers.

The rural school practicum provides a platform for students to integrate theory and practice by practically applying, analysing, synthesising, and evaluating acquired educational psychology knowledge and understanding of theory (Ebersöhn, 2014). The prescribed texts (i.e. readers)

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[1] National Research Foundation (NRF Reference Number: CEC12091412827)

for students in this module are embedded in an asset-based and positive psychology framework with a strong focus on resilience (Ebersöhn, 2014). The readers are centred around the following themes: 'Social Justice and Community Engagement', 'Rural Education and the Educational Psychologist', and 'Psychology for Diversity' (Ebersöhn, 2014, p.29).
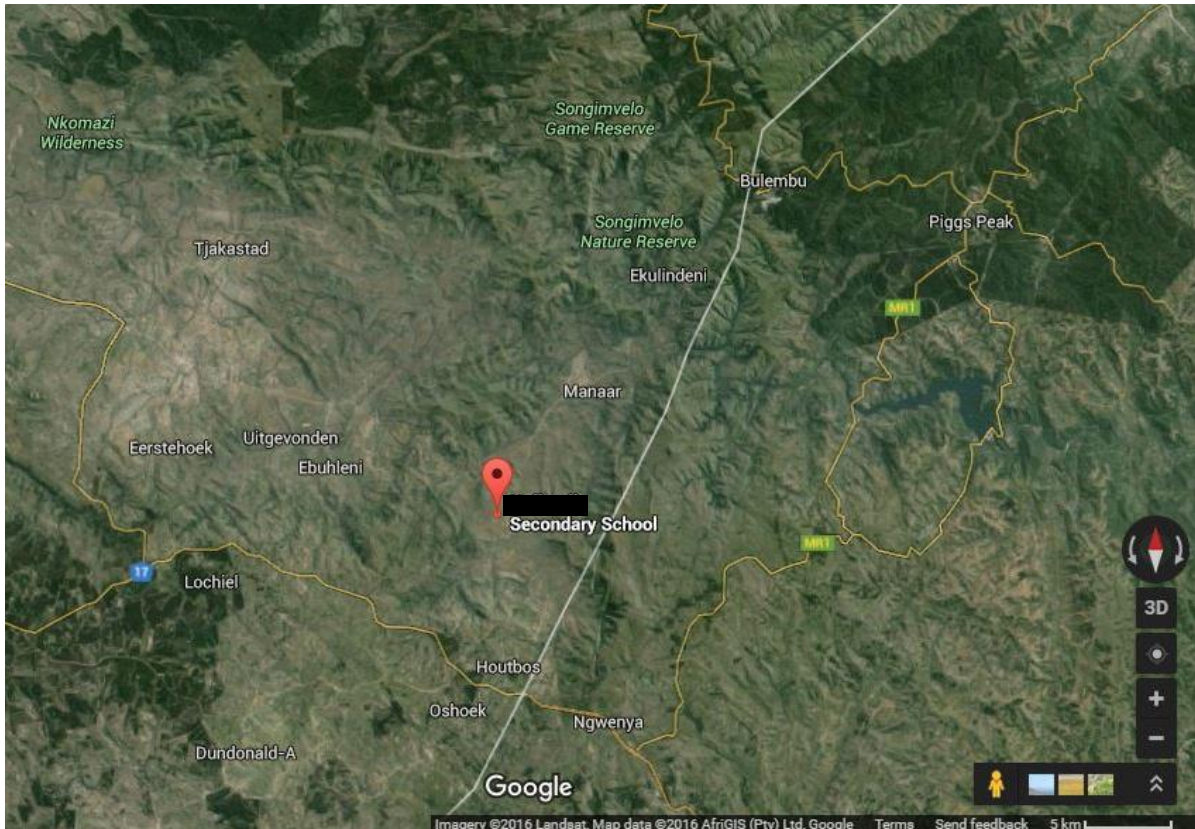
Figure 1.1: Google map of local area

This instrumental case study (Grandy, 2010; Stake, 1995), within a constructivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; McWilliams, 2012; Young & Collin, 2004;), aims to explore how insight into seven cohorts of MEd Educational Psychology students' retrospective experiences of ASL can inform knowledge on higher education community engagement. This understanding will be reached by exploring and describing students' experiences of ASL in a higher education-rural school partnership.

As a Master's student in Educational Psychology myself, who also participated in ASL in 2014 (refer to Appendix A for extracts from my own reflections as an ASL student), I was eager to understand how I, as a future educational psychologist, could be useful in shaping the life stories of learners at schools in South Africa, while also permitting them to enrich my life and career story. This led me to wonder how existing ties between higher education institutions and rural schools could be strengthened and amplified when students, for example, provide

2

psycho-educational services to learners. I was interested in gaining insight into the existing partnership at my university and the retrospective experiences of former students who have participated in the on-going FLY partnership. Thus, my motivation for wanting to research a higher education-rural school partnership with the focus on ASL is that it provides a voice for students to express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions of their involvement in the partnership over the years as a way to add to a distinct body of knowledge, i.e. higher education community engagement.

1.2 PURPOSE AND POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the proposed study is to explore and describe the educational psychology students' experiences of ASL as part of a higher education-rural school partnership. The aim is to inform knowledge on and gain insight into higher education community engagement.

An *exploratory* purpose was essential to yield new insights into students' retrospective experiences of ASL (Babbie, 2005). By exploring students' perceptions of ASL, important patterns of meaning could be identified (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The *descriptive* purpose of my study was valuable to detail students' lived experiences of ASL, in as much complexity as possible. By describing ASL from the students' point of view, a rich array of underlying beliefs, feelings, attitudes, actions, and opinions towards ASL could be documented. Used in isolation, either one of these two approaches (i.e. descriptive and exploratory) would have been too narrow to understand the experiences of ASL students in depth (Babbie, 2005; Yin, 2014). For example, an exploratory approach applied to a case study might only yield data that will assist in determining if the topic needs to be investigated further (Yin, 2014). Together these purposes complement each other to provide a more detailed account of students' experiences of ASL.

If collaborative partnerships among rural schools and educational psychologists are to be fully understood, it is critical to build on shared knowledge and reflections about such partnerships by including the experiences of all parties (Peel, Peel, & Baker, 2002). The results of the proposed study could contribute to the body of scholarly literature on higher education community engagement, specifically in the context of collaborative partnerships between rural schools and universities.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

ASL has a key role to play in higher education community engagement in the context of structural disparity in South Africa; learners in rural schools often have limited access to educational psychology services (Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2012). However, ASL has been criticised for preserving power imbalances between higher education and communities, which hamper the enablement of community partners as meaningful knowledge contributors (Jansen van Rensburg, 2014).

This study aims to explore and describe how seven cohorts of Master's students in Educational Psychology retrospectively experienced their involvement in a partnership between a university and a rural school as part of their ASL practicum. An understanding of students' ASL experiences over the years could contribute to the knowledge system and provide insight into how higher education community engagement can be improved on in the unique context of a country characterised by inequality and diversity.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.4.1 Primary research question

This study is guided by the following primary research question:

- *How can insight into educational psychology students' experiences of their ASL in a higher education-rural school partnership inform knowledge on higher education community engagement?*

1.4.2 Secondary research questions

In an attempt to understand the abovementioned question, the following secondary research questions are explored:

- *What are the ASL students' retrospective experiences of the higher education-rural school partnership that they were involved in?*

- *How do the experiences compare across cohorts?*

- *How can insight into these experiences inform and enhance knowledge on future partnerships?*

1.5 KEY CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

For the sake of elucidation, key concepts used in this research study are clarified. However, a more in-depth discussion of the concepts is provided in Chapter 2.

1.5.1 Higher education community engagement

According to the *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013), higher education community engagement in its different forms can be conceptualised as a key component of the tasks taken on by higher education institutions in the country, along with the core functions of teaching and research. The functions of community engagement include: "socially responsive research, partnerships with civil society organisations, formal learning programmes that engage students in community work as a formal part of their academic programmes, and many other formal and informal aspects of academic work" (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013, p.39).

UP defines community engagement as "the planned, purposeful application of resources and expertise in teaching, learning and research in the University's interaction with the external community to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes in ways that are consistent with the institution's vision and mission" (Department of Education Innovation, 2012, para.5.2). Higher education community engagement views an engaged university as a higher education institution that facilitates meaningful social change by developing all partners into "knowledge brokers" through the process of knowledge enablement (Albertyn & Erasmus, 2014, p.28). A further discussion on community engagement can be found in Chapter 2 (Section 2.3.2).

1.5.2 Academic service learning

The term academic service learning is often used alongside other terms such as "service-learning", "academic community service" and "community-based learning" to refer to a reciprocal form of community engagement whereby students and the community both benefit (i.e. a service is provided to the community and at the same time students' learning experience is enhanced through the service provided) (Higher Education Quality Committee [HEQC], 2006). Although similar in meaning to the above-stated terms, the term academic service learning will be adopted as the preferred term for the purpose of this study as it underscores "the importance of service learning as an academic endeavour" (HEQC, 2006, p.23). In its Community Engagement Policy, UP also makes use of the term ASL when referring to suitable educational approaches that can be used to ensure the contextualisation and integration of curricular community engagement (Department for Education Innovation, 2012).

Bringle and Hatcher's (1996, p.222) comprehensive definition of ASL is often cited in literature and provides insight into the activity of ASL:

> a credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of the course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility.

The following definition of ASL, proposed by the HEQC (2004 p.26), will be used as the operational definition for this study: "applied learning which is directed at specific community needs and is integrated into an academic programme and curriculum. It could be credit-bearing and assessed, and may or may not take place in a work environment." A further discussion on ASL can be found in Chapter 2 (see par. 2.3).

1.5.3 Practicum

The Practicum Competencies Outline (Hatcher & Lassiter, 2007), a document aimed at identifying and defining competencies required at the practicum level, conceptualises the practicum as the first practice-based step on the path towards professional competence in psychology. According to Hatcher and Lassiter (2007, p.49), practicums provide students with training experiences which are supervised and "introduce students to the core competencies of the discipline, bringing classroom education to life in practice settings, and laying groundwork for further training in internship and beyond". At UP, students in Educational Psychology are required to do practicum training in the second year of their Master's degree, which comprises a practicum at the training facility on campus, as well as a school-based practicum at a rural school (Bester, 2014).

1.5.4 Educational psychology student

For clarification purposes, the concept referred to in this study as "educational psychology student" or "student educational psychologist" will be explored by first clarifying the term "student psychologist" and then elucidating the concept "educational psychology".

The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) (2011, p.1) defines a student psychologist as "an individual that is registered with the Board[2] as a psychology student."

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[2] Professional Board of Psychology

Furthermore, an individual is considered to be a student psychologist if he/she is enrolled for a Master's degree at an accredited university and remains a student psychologist until registration as an intern psychologist is completed (HPCSA, 2011). Educational Psychology is one of five registration categories within the field of psychology that is recognised by the Board (HPCSA, 2011).

Lubbe and Eloff (2004, p.29) define the field of Educational Psychology as "the science that concerns itself with theories and practices in psychology and education and the intersections between psychology and education. 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."

1.5.5 Educational psychology cohorts

The South African Concise Oxford Dictionary (Kavanagh, Mantzel, Van Niekerk, Wolvaardt & Wright, 2002, p.224) defines a "cohort" as "a group of people banded together or treated as a group." With regard to the term educational psychology, I refer to the aforementioned definition of the field of educational psychology (see Section 1.5.4).

In this study, the MEd Educational Psychology students were grouped together according to the year in which they completed their ASL practicum. Cohorts of students from the 2007 to 2013 year groups were included as participants in the study and therefore this study consists of seven cohorts of students.

1.5.6 Higher education-rural school partnership

The HEQC (2006, p. 94) defines partnerships as "formal, long-term relationships agreed to by communities, HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) and service agencies to achieve common outcomes." A partnership involves more than one party that engage in joint ventures which emphasise not just the outcome or impact of their action, but also the process (HEQC, 2006). Furthermore, partnerships are characterised by "collaboration, co-operation and the concerted effort of developing sustainable relationships among partners" (HEQC, 2006, p.95).

In this study, the on-going partnership is between a secondary school in a rural area of Mpumalanga and a higher education institution (i.e. Centre for Study of Resilience at UP). Since 2006, Master's students in Educational Psychology from UP have been providing educational psychology services (incl. assessment, therapy and psycho-educational support)

to Grade 9 learners at the rural school as part of their ASL practicum (Ebersöhn, 2014). The partnership is explained in more detail in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3.3).

1.5.7 Retrospective experiences

In the *Collins Cobuild Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, Cobuild (2006, p.497) defines "experience" as "the past events, knowledge, and feelings that make up someone's life or character." "If you experience a particular situation, you are in that situation or it happens to you" (Cobuild, 2006, p.497). "Retrospection" refers to the introspective observation and report of an experience that has already taken place (Gouws, Louw, Meyer, & Plug, 1979).

The retrospective experiences of the participants will refer to their reflection on feelings and opinions about the practicum that they completed as part of their studies. It can be argued that, based on the definition of experience, the ASL practicum formed part of a series of events during their Master's studies that have shaped them as educational psychologists.

1.6 PARADIGMATIC LENSES

1.6.1 Theoretical framework

The main theory that will guide my research is Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 2009). Mezirow (2009, p.92) defines Transformative Learning Theory as "the process by which we transform problematic frames of reference (mindsets, habits of mind, meaning perspectives) – sets of assumption and expectation – to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective and emotionally able to change." Mezirow (2009) explains that frames of reference play an important role in making sense of what we experience as it relies on culture and language to give meaning and coherence to experiences. Transformative learning involves a critical reflection on one's own assumptions as well as that of others (Mezirow, 2009).

Illeris (2014) argues that although Mezirow acknowledges the social and emotional dimensions of learning, most of his theory focuses on the cognitive component. Building on Mezirow's understanding of the transformative learning process, Illeris (2004) extended this concept of learning by considering the other components of learning as equally integral to the learning process. In the current study, Illeris' (2004) model of transformative learning as a comprehensive learning approach will be used as a point of departure to understand how ASL students construct meaning from their retrospective experiences. The theoretical framework is explained in more detail in Chapter 2 (Section 2.6).

1.6.2 Metatheoretical paradigm

The paradigm by which the current study is steered is constructivism. According to McWilliams (2012), constructivism suggests that knowledge is invented and developed as interpretations of experience. In constructivism, which is transactional and subjectivist in nature, researcher and participants engage in a joint effort to construct the findings throughout the investigation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Constructivism pertains to my study as it allows both the participants and the researcher to co-create knowledge and interpret experiences of various cohorts of students. It provided me with a lens through which I could make sense of students' diverse, personal conceptualisation and expression of experiences, which became useful in constructing new knowledge which could inform the approach to partnerships between schools and universities in the future. Further details on my paradigm can be found in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2.1).

1.6.3 Methodological paradigm

A qualitative methodological approach guides this study. Qualitative methodology, which is based on people's understanding of social reality, facilitates the process of making sense of phenomena by considering it within its context, including people's actions, meaning-making, and experiences of power, structures, and agency (Hartas, 2010). The qualitative approach enabled me to generate findings that could enhance our understanding of participants' unique experiences of ASL within the unique context of a rural school-higher education partnership. Henwood and Pidgeon (1992, p.98-99) suggest that characteristics associated with qualitative methodology, within a naturalistic paradigm, that applies to the exploratory and descriptive nature of my study. The relevance of these characteristics to the purpose of my study is discussed in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2.2).

1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this section I introduce the instrumental case study research design used in this study. Other methodological choices such as the selection of participants, research context, data collection and documentation techniques, and the data analysis method are also introduced. Table 1.1 provides a visual overview of the research design and methodology. A full description of the research process is presented in Chapter 3 (Sections 3.3 to 3.6).

Table 1.1: Overview of research design and methodology

Research design
Instrumental case study   • An *instrumental case study design* enabled me to study the way in which participants create meaning of their practicum experiences and to co-create an in-depth account of ASL together with the participants.   • The insights gained into students' experiences are *instrumental* to obtain a clearer understanding of community engagement partnerships between universities and rural schools and how these partnerships could potentially be improved upon.

Defining the instrumental case:	**Convenient sampling of case:**
The case is defined as the perspectives of cohorts of UP Master's students in Educational Psychology on an existing school-based intervention (i.e. FLY partnership).	Seven cohorts of MEd Educational Psychology ASL students in an existing school-based intervention who conducted assessments and interventions with Grade 9 learners in a rural school over a period of 7 years.

Paradigmatic assumptions	
Methodological paradigm:	Qualitative methodology
Epistemological paradigm	Constructivism

Selection of participants
Sampling method: Purposive sampling of participants (n=22, female=18, male=4, 2007 cohort=3, 2008 cohort =1, 2009 cohort=5, 2010 cohort=5, 2011 cohort=4, 2012 cohort=1, 2013 cohort=3) from above instrumental case.   **Sampling criteria:** (i) Former UP students who completed their Educational Psychology practicum at the rural school in the last eight years since the start of the project in 2006, and (ii) Participants were purposefully selected to be representative in terms of year, age, gender, and language.

Contextualising the case
The research site where the on-going partnership has been situated, is located in Mpumalanga and is representative of other rural schools in this province: mainly agricultural livelihood characterised by extreme poverty and isolated from basic services, with high incidences of HIV-infection and AIDS-related loss (De Jongh, 2013).

Data collection and documentation	
Data collection techniques: • Questionnaires (n=17), informed consent forms and demographic questionnaires emailed to participants following email invitation to participants. • Semi-structured interviews based on questionnaire and conducted either telephonically (n=1) or face-to-face (n=4).	**Data documentation techniques** • Verbatim transcriptions of audio-recorded interviews. • Completed questionnaires.
Data analysis and interpretation	
Thematic analysis, a form of inductive, interpretive analysis, was used to analyse the data based on strategies proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006).	

1.8 QUALITY CRITERIA

Methodological rigor was achieved by using the model of trustworthiness proposed by Guba (1981) and Lincoln and Guba (1985), which consists of four general criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The aforementioned criteria were applied to this study by using strategies suggested by Shenton (2004), Krefting (1991), and Seale (1999) to ensure rigor without compromising the relevance of the qualitative inquiry (Krefting, 1991). Table 1.2 presents a summary of the strategies with which trustworthiness was employed in this study. The quality criteria of this study are discussed in detail in Chapter 3 (Section 3.7).

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In view of the fact that this study formed part of a broader research project (FLY project) in which I was included as co-researcher, permission to conduct the research had already been obtained from the Ethics Committee of UP. The ethical code of the HPCSA guided my ethical conduct as a student psychologist registered with the Board. Written informed consent was obtained from all research participants in the study (Appendix B), as well as from the Dean of Groenkloof Campus from the Faculty of Education, UP. In light of the nature of the study, that required participants to share subjective experiences, due consideration was given to the ethical principles of confidentiality, risk factors, sensitivity, and anonymity. In order to preserve the human dignity of my participants, all reasonable measures were taken to be continually aware of and avoid potential harm of any kind to my participants.

11

Table 1.2: Summary of quality criteria strategies (adapted from Krefting, 1991, p.217)

Criteria	Description	Strategies
Credibility	Representing multiple realities revealed by participants as accurately as possible (Krefting, 1991).	• Well-established research methods • Triangulation of data methods and data sources (i.e. multiple cohorts) • Member checking • Review by peers and supervisors • Thick descriptions of the partnership and its context • Measures to ensure honesty of participants
Transferability	The extent to which findings are applicable to other situations to enable possible transference of findings to similar studies (Shenton, 2004).	• Rich, detailed descriptions of research setting
Dependability	Contributes to the trustworthiness of a study by reporting on the "consistency of findings" (Krefting, 1991, p.221).	• Detailed account of research procedures, data, decisions and end product in the form of documentation (i.e. auditability)
Confirmability	The qualitative equivalent of neutrality and by implication, researcher objectivity (Krefting, 1991).	• Triangulation of data methods and data sources (i.e. multiple cohorts) • Audit trail (See Table 3.4)

1.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided background information and an introduction to the research study. It then stated the purpose and possible contributions of the study, as well as primary and secondary research questions as it progressed to a conceptualisation of the key terms used in the study: higher education community engagement, academic service learning, practicum, educational psychology student, educational psychology cohorts, higher education-rural school partnership, and retrospective experiences. The paradigmatic lenses that guided the study, as well as the research design and methodology, were then discussed in brief. The chapter concludes with an outline of all the chapters.

1.11 CHAPTER OUTLINE

❖ **Chapter 1: Overview of the study**

In Chapter 1, I introduce the present study by contextualising the study and discussing the rationale, purpose and possible contributions of the study. The research questions are formulated and key concepts defined. I provide an overview of the paradigmatic choices, research design and methodology, quality criteria, ethical considerations, and the chapters to follow.

❖ **Chapter 2: Literature review**

Chapter 2 presents a review of local and international literature on students' experiences of ASL and contextualises the fundamental role of ASL in promoting higher education community engagement partnerships.

I situate South African higher education within the global literature on higher education transformation, provide a brief overview of ASL in relation to other forms of higher education training and community engagement, and conceptualise ASL within the framework of a scholarship of engagement. I go on to explore students' experiences of ASL within the context of higher education community engagement partnerships, and discuss national and global trends in the training of psychologists, focussing on the role of educational psychologists in rural South Africa. I conclude the chapter by discussing the theoretical framework in the light of the literature I've reviewed.

❖ **Chapter 3: Research methodology**

This chapter commences with a discussion of the purpose of the study and explores the paradigmatic assumptions guided by the research questions. I explain the case study research design and methodological choices I made, detailing the data collection, documentation and analysis strategies, exploring the strengths and limitations of these choices and elaborating on my attempts to address the particular challenges. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the ethical guidelines I adhered to and the quality criteria strategies I adopted for the purpose of this study.

❖ **Chapter 4: Research results and discussion of findings**

This chapter entails a presentation on the results of my research according to the themes and sub-themes that emerged as a result of careful analysis of the data across cohorts. I

discuss the results of the study by linking these findings with relevant literature reviewed. Throughout the chapter, I attempt to highlight similarities and explain any potential contradictions between the literature and my interpretations of the findings.

❖ **Chapter 5: Conclusions and recommendations**

In the final chapter I summarise the research findings in relation to the research questions and purpose that steered this study. Possible contributions and perceived limitations of the study are also discussed. The chapter concludes with recommendations for practice, training, and future research.

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2.1 INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on gaining insight into educational psychology students' retrospective experiences of ASL in a university-rural school partnership in order to inform higher education community engagement.

The purpose of this chapter is to present a review of literature that highlights students' experiences of ASL as well as contextualising the intrinsic role of ASL in supporting higher education community engagement efforts. Initially, I focus on situating South African higher education within the global context of higher education transformation with particular reference to the current issues of inequality and diversity, social justice and cohesion, and knowledge sharing. This is followed by a brief overview of ASL compared to other forms of higher education training and community engagement. I then conceptualise ASL within the scholarship of engagement and focus on students' experiences of ASL, both locally and internationally. Thereafter, I explore higher education community engagement partnerships and the value that such partnerships hold for all stakeholders, especially rural school partners. Next, I discuss trends in the training of psychologists internationally and nationally, paying particular attention to the role of educational psychologists in rural South Africa. Finally, I present the theoretical framework in the light of the literature I have reviewed.

2.2 THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN A DIVERSE, UNEQUAL SOCIETY

South African higher education is not unique in its efforts to adapt to socio-political transformation embedded in a landscape of inequality and diversity. Since the dawn of the 21st century, higher education institutions across Africa have experienced challenges unparalleled in the history of the continent with an ever-increasing demand for entry into academic institutions despite significant resource constraints (Teferra & Altbach, 2004). On a global scale, Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley (2009, p.2) refer to the changes that have taken place in higher education since the late 20th century as an "academic revolution", with one of its main concerns being diversity and how to make higher education inclusive of all marginalised groups in society. In order for higher education to become more accessible to all subgroups of society, countries need to confront "social inequalities deeply rooted in history, culture, and economic structure that affect an individual's ability to compete" (Altbach et al., 2009, p.43).

15

The challenge of effectively dealing with diversity extends to societies worldwide who are grappling with developing nation states that cater for the preservation and integration of citizens' diversity while simultaneously constructing "an overarching national identity that incorporates the voices, experiences, and hopes of the diverse groups that compose it" (Banks, 2008, p.133). Banks (2008) advocates for transformative citizen education as a means of equipping students to challenge inequality both locally and internationally, to develop pluralistic worldviews, and to actively participate in initiatives that promote social justice and democratic values in communities and societies.

Stephens, Hernandez, Román, Graham, and Scholz (2008) draw attention to the historical role that higher education institutions worldwide have played as agents of change in response to relevant social challenges, including social injustice. They argue that higher education continues to act as a critical role player in the global trends toward more sustainable societies in the face of "rapidly changing, increasingly unequal, complex and interconnected societal structure" (Stephens et al., 2008, p.318). Onyx (2008) adds to the role of higher education by conceptualising universities as potential mediators in societies historically marked by political disparities. Onyx (2008) illustrates her point by referring to South African universities' mediating role between the community and the government in establishing community service in rural settings.

African universities still experience the deep-seated effects that emanated from the former colonial policy that limited these higher education institutions' independence in terms of access, language of instruction, academic freedom and curriculum (Teferra & Altbach, 2004). Teferra and Altbach (2004) argue that the shift towards a knowledge era in Africa has resulted in growing pressure on Africa's education systems to take the lead in addressing pressing challenges concerning the continent. Higher academic institutions are now increasingly being acknowledged as a key role player in the future development of Africa's economic, cultural, and political transformation (Teferra & Altbach, 2004).

Regardless of the positive transformation that has taken place since the end of the Apartheid Era, a closer look reveals that South Africa continues to suffers from inequality (e.g. between rural and urban environments) and widespread poverty (Pennefather, 2008). The country remains vulnerable to an unequal distribution of wealth with high rates of poverty, homelessness and unemployment among black South Africans (Dass-Brailsford, 2005). Along with the country's on-going efforts to deal with these deep-seated disparities, it also strives towards the continued strengthening and upholding of its democratic values (Walker & Loots, 2016). Dass-Brailsford (2005) is concerned about the effect that socio-economic challenges are having on children's growth and development, as well as their sense of trust,

16

safety and security. School-going children still experience inequality in terms of "socio-economic backgrounds, school infrastructure and resources; learner-teacher ratios; qualifications of teachers; availability of teachers and shortages in key subjects; school 'culture'" (Pennefather, 2008, p.81).

Higher education has emerged as an institutional change agent in South Africa to address the above inequities, with community engagement as a central function (Van Schalkwyk & Erasmus, 2011). Embedded in the context of South African higher education, community engagement can be conceptualised as "various professional and academic activities pursued in partnership with local communities" (Lazarus et al., 2014, p.155). A higher education community engagement partnership is characterised by partners that are considered to be equals and collaborators, working together to ensure equal acknowledgement of each partner's assets (Netshandama, 2010). The combined end goals of both parties can be understood in terms of social transformation and enhanced democratic values (Ferreira & Ebersöhn, 2012).

2.2.1 Contextual issues: diversity and inequality

The rich diversity found in South Africa signifies unique challenges to effective higher education community engagement. Diversity can be conceptualised as "the differences that highlight uniqueness because each entity is moulded from a distinct history, knowledge tradition, philosophy, and social and political reality" (Ermine, 2007, p.194). Acknowledgement of these differences can be seen as a requirement for engagement with any community different from one's own (Ermine, 2007). Swart and Pettipher (2011, p.9) argue that transformation requires a shift to values of "mutual acceptance, respect for diversity, a sense of belonging and social justice".

The high level of diversity in South Africa exacerbates the pressure on schools and universities to collaborate as partners in the on-going process of transformation. Educational psychologists are in the position to play a significant role in this regard by addressing diversity and inequality through service provision to a wide variety of learners. Educational psychologists 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" (Engelbrecht, 2004, p.23). A better understanding of students' experiences of ASL in multicultural environments may be valuable in informing training programs that can make psychological services equally available to learners with diverse learning needs and cultural backgrounds.

2.2.2 Social justice and social cohesion

Social justice can be conceptualised as central to the discourse on community engagement partnerships and ASL. At the turn of the 21st century, social justice dialogue has garnered increased attention, with scholars and practitioners in the field of education and leadership, among other disciplines, displaying growing interest in this area of concern (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Furman & Gruenewald, 2004). Frank, Tshemese, and Mayekiso (2007, pp.236-237) define social justice as "the non-discriminatory distribution of power, resources and opportunities in society". In recent years, scholars have also become more cognisant of the role that higher education can potentially play in increasing the social cohesion within communities (Moiseyenko, 2005).

Although efforts to achieve social justice and social cohesion have been set into motion since the first South African democratic election in 1994, Balfour, Mitchell, and Moletsane (2008) are startled by the fact that not much has changed in rural contexts. They are concerned about the failure of initiates, which are meant to bring about social change, to adequately address the pressing issues of poverty alleviation and sustainable development (Balfour et al., 2008). Petersen, Dunbar-Krige, and Fritz (2008) promote a framework of care and social justice as conducive in efforts to achieve higher education community engagement and close the gap between theory and practice. John (2006) advocates for social justice to be actively pursued in South African university-community partnerships as a means of acknowledging the voices of all groups involved and ensuring that the community shares in project outcomes. A recent study of participants' experiences of a university-community partnership in Israel showed that one of the cornerstones of a sustainable partnership is "balancing unequal power relations between partners as well as the coordination of contrasting perceptions of partnership" (Strier, 2011, p.95).

Social justice is embedded in ASL in that it provides students with the opportunity to explore the interaction between equality and power on a personal and societal level (Van der Merwe & Dunbar-Krige, 2007). Multicultural ASL endorses social justice by attending to power dynamics on two levels: Firstly, among diverse racial and ethnic groups, and secondly, between students and the community members being served (Rosner-Salazar, 2003). Not only does ASL encourage critical thinking of social justice, but it also provides a platform for students to envisage new avenues for social change in marginalised communities (Rosner-Salazar, 2003). Two ways in which higher education institutions can affect social cohesion is by pursuing themes of social cohesion in curriculum programs and by involving students in local community development (Moiseyenko, 2005).

Counsellors and psychologists, as leaders in multicultural competence, are considered to have an indispensable role to play in the facilitation of social justice and social cohesion (Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi, & Bryant, 2007). Cress (2005) proposes that the objective of ASL courses is to develop graduates into responsible citizens that will be able to apply the meaning gained from their experiences to societal issues in the future. ASL can provide a platform for psychology and counselling students to broaden their capacity to work with diverse individuals and to increase their readiness to assume social justice roles within society (Constantine et al., 2007). Constantine et al. (2007) encourage higher education institutions to invest in future health care professionals' competency levels by reviewing and making necessary changes to training programs. It is in this instance that psychology students' experiences of ASL may provide the impetus to shape future programs and partnerships that will reflect the critical notion of social justice and social cohesion for the benefit of communities and society at large.

2.2.3 Knowledge sharing

One way of promoting collaboration and networking between partnering universities and communities is the co-construction of knowledge. Several higher education institutions now provide a platform for students to learn in community settings as a means of introducing them to the process of active knowledge construction (Mthembu & Mtshali, 2013). Through ASL, the transference of knowledge between students and community partners becomes a bi-directional, collaborative process (Rosner-Salazar, 2003). ASL activities afford students the opportunity to build on their knowledge of communities and cultures while bringing with them academic knowledge and formal training that can be applied in serving alongside the community (Rosner-Salazar, 2003). Unfortunately, students often fail to fully acknowledge and appreciate the myriad resources that communities have to offer in terms of knowledge and skills (Petersen, 2007). ASL thus needs to support students in connecting the dots between new knowledge and existing knowledge systems on both a professional and personal level (Petersen, 2007).

Netshandama (2010, p.349) argues that academics are not solely responsible for knowledge generation: "There is a need to recover indigenous knowledge from the grassroots, to hear the voices from below, to learn from them and to represent their experiences in the process of knowledge construction". Both indigenous knowledge and scientific knowledge are closely tied to issues of power and social relationships within society (Mercer, Kelman, Taranis, & Suchet-Pearson, 2010). Maree, Ebersöhn, and Molepo (2006) underscore the responsibility of counsellors in diverse settings to obtain comprehensive insight into indigenous knowledge systems if communication and understanding between counsellor and client is to be optimised.

Maree et al. (2006), in proposing a narrative approach to career counselling, suggest that by integrating indigenous knowledge into existing knowledge frameworks, a platform is created to cultivate a sense of theoretical and practical ownership in marginalised groups.

It is hoped that this study will contribute to current understandings of how the interplay between indigenous knowledge and academic knowledge is perceived by students who were engaged in an ASL practicum at a rural school. As the participants in this study are former students who have been gaining working experience over the last few years, it will be of special interest to see how they have transferred knowledge gains from the community they worked with during their practicum to their everyday work with clients.

2.3 ACADEMIC SERVICE LEARNING

Internationally, ASL has become a recognised field of knowledge due to alterations in the nature of higher education (Le Roux & Mitchell, 2008). Bringle and Hatcher (2007) consider research on ASL as essential in advancing the practice and understanding of ASL internationally. The three primary reasons for conducting research on ASL, put forward by Howard (2003), are to inform ASL practices, to strengthen the case for ASL as a recognised field of research amongst scholars and to build up a knowledge base of empirical findings on the benefits of ASL in higher education. Guided by this rationale for ASL research, this study aims to inform higher education community engagement with ASL as a central function.

There is a growing amount of research being done on ASL in South Africa and the US, and Thomson, Smith-Tolken, Naidoo, and Bringle (2011) argue that literature produced in these two countries has a major contribution to make to the theoretical framework for ASL in other African countries.

2.3.1 Emergence and development of academic service learning

2.3.1.1 Conceptualising academic service learning within a scholarship of engagement

Towards the end of the 20th century, Boyer (1996) advocated for a scholarship of engagement in which institutions of higher learning were called to become a relevant partner in addressing the pressing issues faced by society, including children, schools, teachers and cities in particular. Boyer (1996) encouraged higher education institutions to use its resources to serve a larger purpose that would benefit not just themselves, but also the greater public good, helping to establish a more just society. According to Boyer (1996), extensive research supports the benefits for any culture, when scholars and practitioners engage with each other. Boyer (1996, p.33) asserts that, "ultimately, the scholarship of engagement means creating a

special climate in which the academic and civic cultures communicate more continuously and more creatively with each other."

A scholarship of engagement has since emerged worldwide in which higher education institutions undertake to be "socially relevant and responsive to the needs of their broader communities" (John, 2006, p.51). Netshandama (2010, p.352) supports the notion of "engaged scholarship", arguing that it can assist universities in serving society by "preparing students to be active, principled citizens and by linking knowledge to the public good." ASL can be considered a plausible way for higher education to integrate community involvement into its institutions, as it supports the increasing emphasis on a scholarship of engagement through collaborative practices that align with the missions of higher education institutions (Bringle & Hatcher, 2007). According to Bringle and Hatcher (2007, p.274), the institutionalisation of ASL will be accomplished when "transformation of the work of colleges and universities on the scholarship of engagement occurs that is integral, enduring, and meaningful to all stakeholders".

2.3.1.2 Academic service learning in South Africa

Although international studies on higher education community engagement have yielded valuable knowledge that aid our understanding of higher education-community partnerships, Strier (2011) cautions that the unique national backdrop of such partnerships should be considered when knowledge is transferred from one context to another. Mouton and Wildschut (2005, p.119) concur that "South African scholars should not necessarily adopt American or other external models" of ASL. For this reason, the efficacy of current models of ASL implemented at the various universities and within diverse communities should be continually evaluated in order to make necessary adjustments that can lead to a more balanced and equal society.

The concept of ASL in South Africa emerged as a result of several organisations in the late 90s that were committed to invest in ASL in the higher education sector (Petersen & Osman, 2013). One pivotal example is that of the Community- Higher Education- Service Partnership introduced in 1999 based on the results of a survey on community service two years prior, which had been made possible by a grant from the Ford Foundation (Petersen & Osman, 2013). This partnership aimed to facilitate the incorporation of ASL into academic programs and curricula at higher education institutions to ultimately achieve community engagement (Petersen & Osman, 2013).

Various documents outlined in South Africa's policy framework are based on the premise of higher education community engagement (Petersen & Osman, 2013). Community

engagement, volunteerism and ASL are all embedded in South African education policy documents, stressing the significant role of ASL in accomplishing their goals (Le Roux & Mitchell, 2008). In addition, ASL in South Africa is included in higher education institutions' culture and mission with the aim of obtaining optimal service integration (Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009). However, although the significance of ASL is reflected in relevant policy documents, it is still considered relatively novel to South African higher education institutions compared to other countries (Le Roux & Mitchell, 2008).

Despite a wealth of literature on ASL internationally, scholarly studies on community engagement and ASL, seems to be limited in South Africa (Le Roux & Mitchell, 2008; Van Schalkwyk & Erasmus, 2011). Le Roux and Mitchell (2008) maintain that the United States (US), Canada, and Europe have generated a substantial amount of literature on ASL compared to South Africa. Although ASL as such has not been characterised by a strong research base in South Africa, "associated fields of interests such as community service, community development, experiential learning, situated cognition and workplace learning have received some attention" (Mouton & Wildschut, 2005, p.119). Howard (2003) further highlights that although there is a large body of research-based knowledge on the impact of community engaged learning on students during the course of an ASL practicum, studies on the effects of ASL on students over an extended period of time is rare. In this study we hope to address this limitation in the existing body of knowledge by exploring students' experiences of ASL a year or more post-practicum.

2.3.2 Academic service learning as a form of community engagement

In order to understand how ASL is positioned within higher education community engagement, it should be considered in relation to other forms of community engagement. The HEQC (2006), with acknowledgement to the *Good Practice Guide* (HEQC/JET, 2006, pp. 13-17), propose a useful way of viewing different forms of community engaged learning suitable to the South African context, by making use of a continuum consisting of two core dimensions: the primary beneficiaries of the service (community and student) and the primary goal of the service (service and learning). In Figure 2.1, the various forms of students' community engagement are visually summarised according to the two core dimensions, resulting in five forms of community engagement (HEQC, 2006, p.21, as adapted from Furco, 1996).

BENEFICIARY

Community ←————————————————————————————→ Student

GOAL

Service ←————————————————————————————→ Learning
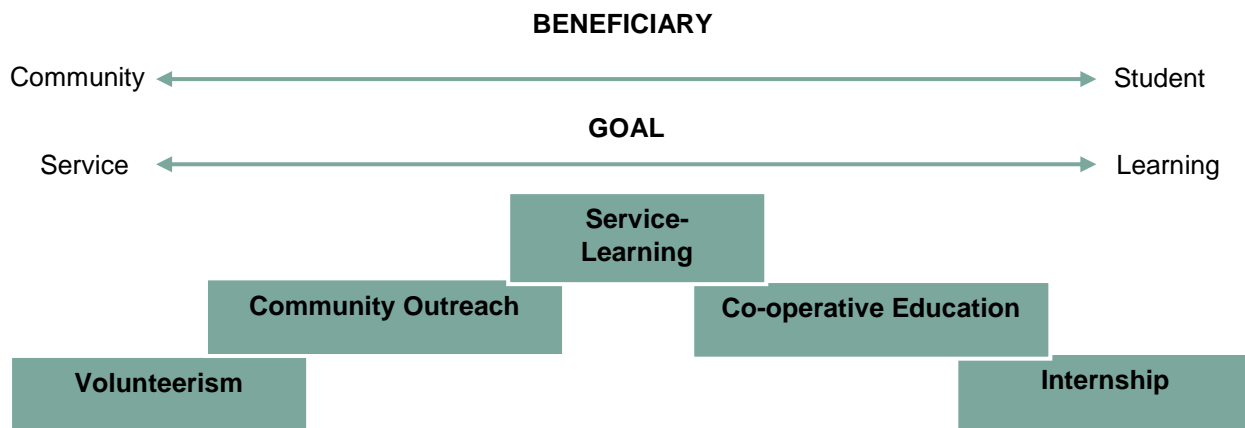
Figure 2.1. Forms of community engagement (Adapted from Furco, 1996, p.3, as cited in HEQC, 2006, p.21).

The main feature shared by these community engagement forms is their close relation to experiential learning and for this reason overlap often occurs across boundaries (HEQC, 2006). Volunteerism and community outreach share the community as their principal beneficiary with their primary aim being the delivery of a service; however, community outreach engages students in a learning program that is more structured and requires students to invest more in the process compared to volunteerism (HEQC, 2006). Internships, on the other hand, are mostly meaningful to the student and the core function is the learning process itself (HEQC, 2006). Similar to internships, co-operative learning supports the notion of student as main beneficiary and learning as the key goal but differs from internships in that it is not as integrated into the academic curriculum (HEQC, 2006).

Although these types of experiential learning all comprise some elements of community engagement, the emphasis tends to be on either community service or ASL (HEQC, 2006). What makes ASL different from other approaches to experiential learning is its efforts to ensure equal benefits for both partners and to place equal emphasis on both the processes of service and learning (Furco, 1996). In this equally beneficial partnership between student and community, reciprocity is conceptualised as a key asset (HEQC, 2006).

Butin (2005, p.viii) describes ASL as a "deeply engaging, local, and impactful practice" that challenges traditional practices in higher education institutions. Mouton and Wildschut (2005) provide an overview of the concept ASL by drawing on definitions by Eyler and Giles (1999), Bringle and Hatcher (1995), The Campus Compact National Center for Community Colleges, and World Wise Schools Educators. Based on the shared features embedded in these definitions, Mouton and Wildschut (2005) identify three broad features that define ASL: it is

embedded in an experientially-based understanding of the community's needs; it has a reflective component and is strongly connected to academic learning; and it adds to students' knowledge of community issues and encourages active participation in addressing these issues.

In order to streamline the integration of ASL into higher education institutions, an audit of all existing community engagement activities offered at a particular institution is required (i.e. community outreach, community service, volunteerism, community-based education, work-integrated learning, field education, internships etc.) (HEQC, 2006). The HEQC (2006) recommends that an audit of this kind should aim to identify the experiential learning that has taken place within each of these activities. This highlights the need for studies on students' experiences of different forms of community engagement that can serve as a starting point for shaping future experiential learning activities that meet the needs and expectations of all role players.

2.3.3 Students' experiences of academic service learning

Globally, an increasing number of studies have been conducted on students' attitudes towards and experiences of ASL across various disciplines and in various educational settings (e.g. Cress, 2005; Ellerton et al., 2015; Gross, 2005; Kretchmar, 2001; McCarthy & Tucker, 1999; Moely, McFarland, Miron, Mercer, & Ilustre, 2002; Sedlak, Doheny, Panthofer, & Anaya, 2003; Simons et al., 2012). All of the afore-mentioned studies were done in the northern hemisphere, with the majority emanating from the US, which is not unusual considering that the US was responsible for the origin of the term 'service learning' and its related activities (Thomson et al., 2011).

These studies looked at ASL experiences in undergraduate (e.g. Kretchmar, 2001; McCarthy & Tucker, 1999; Moely et al., 2002; Simons et al., 2012), as well as graduate students (e.g. Gross, 2005, Moely et al., 2002; McCarthy & Tucker, 1999). Most of these studies made use of surveys that included both scale-response items and open-ended questions to assess students' experiences and perceptions of ASL (e.g. Ellerton et al., 2015; Gross, 2005; Kretchmar, 2001; Simons et al., 2012), while some studies relied on quantitative surveys only (e.g. McCarthy & Tucker, 1999; Moely et al., 2002). Some studies focused on one field of study (e.g. Gross, 2005; Kretchmar, 2001; Simons et al., 2012), while others explored students' experiences from an inter-disciplinary stance (e.g. Ellerton et al., 2015; Moely et al., 2002). Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, and Yee (2000) draw attention to the fact that literature on ASL has neglected the systematic investigation of different fields of study and types of institutions where ASL was conducted. Astin et al. (2000) highlight the importance of

differences across the various fields of psychology that demand attention. Therefore, this study represents an effort to be as specific as possible by addressing the lack of studies on students' experiences of an educational psychology practicum as part of a tertiary institution's partnership with a rural school.

Gibson, Sandenbergh and Swartz (2001) note the advantage of studying students' own accounts of their experiences as opposed to exploring students' experiences through the lens of a lecturer, supervisor, or community practice coordinator. Furthermore, international studies have focused most of their attention on the experiences of students already engaged in ASL (Bender & Jordaan, 2007). Studies such as the current study, that investigate and compare ASL experiences from the student's perspective over several years, are limited as studies tend to be cross-sectional (e.g. Ellerton et al., 2015; Gross, 2005; Kretchmar, 2001; Malekane, 2009; McCarthy & Tucker, 1999; Pillay, 2003), focusing on a single cohort of ASL students' experiences, which makes it difficult to see how perceptions change or remain the same over time.

Eyler (2002) makes a compelling argument for the value of students reflecting on ASL after it has been completed, especially in terms of applying it to potential future community engagement involvement. According to Eyler (2002), studies that have investigated the long-term impact of ASL on school and college students, have been promising, yet limited. Kernahan and Davis (2007), studying racial awareness among students enrolled in a prejudice and racism course, underscore the need for studies that follow a longitudinal approach to exploring how students' knowledge gains extend beyond the tertiary setting. This strengthens the case for studying educational psychologists' retrospective experiences post-ASL between one year and seven years following their ASL.

Those studies that have undertaken to examine students' perceptions of ASL, have found that students generally value their ASL experiences (e.g. Eyler, 2002; Kretchmar, 2001). More specifically, students tend to experience enhancements in terms of personal growth (e.g. Cress, 2005; Simons et al., 2012) and professional development (e.g. Simons et al., 2012). Studies have also shown that ASL is experienced by students as leading to improved critical-thinking competence, (e.g. Sedlak et al., 2003), enhanced academic learning (e.g. Cress, 2005; Ellerton et al., 2015; Sedlak et al., 2003), improved ethical/moral decision-making (e.g. Cress, 2005), as well as increased concern for and understanding of social justice and multicultural competence (e.g. Cress, 2005; Moely et al., 2002; Simons et al., 2012; Thomson et al., 2011). ASL at undergraduate level also seems to play a role in students' re-thinking of their educational or career choices (e.g. Kretchmar, 2001; Simons et al., 2012).

2.3.3.1 South African students' experiences of academic service learning

In the light of the growing body of literature on ASL worldwide, Thomson et al. (2011) is concerned about the lack of research pertaining to how non-Western countries are interpreting ASL. Despite this limitation, increasing attention has been given in South African literature to the experiences of different role players in ASL programs in South Africa. The following have been explored: communities (e.g. Linda, Mtshali & Engelbrecht, 2013; Van Schalkwyk & Erasmus, 2011), students (e.g. Dana & Gwele, 1998; Ebersöhn, Bender, & Carvalho-Malekane, 2010; Mouton & Wildschut, 2005; Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009; Roos et al., 2005) and other stakeholders such as policy makers and academic staff (e.g. Erasmus, 2007; Mtshali, 2009).

Research methods used to explore ASL partners' perceptions and experiences in the South African context varied and included mostly qualitative methodologies (i.e. interviews, focus groups, reflective journals and open-ended questionnaires) (e.g. Ebersöhn, Bender, & Carvalho-Malekane, 2010; Pillay, 2003; Roos et al., 2005), as well as (to a lesser extent) quantitative methods (e.g. Dana & Gwele, 1998) and mixed methods designs (e.g. Erasmus, 2007).

Literature on ASL in South Africa has included studies on both undergraduate and postgraduate students (e.g. Roos et al., 2005), from various disciplines including psychology (e.g. Ebersöhn et al., 2010; Pillay, 2003), nursing (e.g. Dana & Gwele, 1998), occupational therapy and social work (e.g. Roos et al., 2005). However, at the time of conducting the research study, only two studies were found on postgraduate educational psychology students' experiences of ASL. One study documented first and second year MEd Educational Psychology students' experiences of a community psychology module (Pillay, 2003), while another study explored one cohort of MEd Educational Psychology students' experiences of an ASL practicum at a different university (Ebersöhn et al., 2010; Malekane, 2009).

There have also been some comprehensive, inter-university studies on ASL from the viewpoint of different partners (e.g. students, scholars, service partners and community partners) such as Naidoo and Devnarain's (2009) investigation of four universities in South Africa which included different modules across various disciplines. Furthermore, a large-scale evaluation of ASL courses was conducted at five higher education institutions in the country during 2001 and 2002 (Mouton & Wildschut, 2005). Narrative accounts provided by the various course convenors at the end of the course, as well as questionnaires completed by all role players, were used as the main data collection methods in this study (Mouton & Wildschut, 2005). In another study, a longitudinal, interdisciplinary approach was followed to explore final

year students' experiences of a collaborative module (i.e. Community, Self and Identity) at two institutions in Cape Town (Carolissen, 2012).

Research in South Africa seems to be in line with students' experiences of ASL reported elsewhere in the world. Analysis of data reveals a generally positive reception of ASL amongst South African university students (Mouton & Wildschut, 2005; Carolissen, 2012). Van der Merwe and Dunbar-Krige (2007, p.300) encapsulate students' ASL experiences as "authentic, interactive, and reflective learning experiences". Findings suggest that students were the main beneficiaries of ASL and that they experienced benefits in terms of professional competencies (e.g. Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009), leadership skills (e.g. Mouton & Wildschut, 2005), self-awareness (e.g. Roos et al., 2005), theory-practice integration (e.g. Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009), and especially cultural/societal/environmental awareness (e.g. Mouton & Wildschut, 2005; Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009; Roos et al., 2005). Furthermore, students responded positively to the benefits of being exposed to challenges that can be expected in the workplace (e.g. Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009), as well as the impact of ASL on future orientation and decisions regarding career choices (e.g. Mouton & Wildschut, 2005).

Undergraduate and postgraduate students of the Faculty of Humanities at a South African university reported enhanced awareness of a sense of community; recognition of the value of collaboration; sensitivity for diverse cultures and languages; and increased insight into facilitating social change (Roos et al., 2005). As a result of enhanced insight into the communities, cultures, languages and indigenous knowledge they came into contact with, students in another study reported, "becoming more tolerant and appreciative of diversity" (Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009, p.944). The main findings in a small group of MEd Educational Psychology students suggest that the students reaped benefits in terms of intercultural competence and group work competence by participating in community engagement activities (Ebersöhn et al., 2010). In a study by Pillay (2003), MEd Educational Psychology students who have had limited exposure to community work as part of their course work, expressed the need for more training in community engagement in order to provide services to individuals within diverse communities.

Findings from a longitudinal study of final year students in psychology, social work and occupational therapy showed that student feedback during and immediately following the module were exceptionally positive, while data gathered two to three years after completion of the module revealed a "positive, but more sober view" of the impact the module had on the students (Carolissen, 2012, p.69). Carolissen (2012) advocates for more studies of a retrospective nature that can provide insight into how modules on tertiary level continue to contribute to young professionals' capacities as they step into the work environment.

27

Hullender, Hinck, Wood-Nartker, Burton, and Bowlby (2015, p.76) assert the significance of time and distance in the meaning-making process: "Re-constructing takes time, often time away from the service that has created the dissonance, in order to re-assemble the new perspectives generated by the experience, the reflective activities and questions, and the course readings." In addition, Hullender et al. (2015, p.76) suggest that time enables learners to link past ASL experiences with their current "identity, position and power" dynamics.

Building on the qualitative studies that have already been done on the topic of ASL experiences in the South African context, the emerged insights of this study could provide information on how various cohorts of students reflect on their retrospective experiences of ASL after completion of their practicum. Due to the limited literature available on educational psychology students' experiences, the focus of this study is pivotal in gaining insight into the challenges and benefits of ASL from the vantage point of Master's students in Educational Psychology.

2.4 HIGHER EDUCATION-RURAL SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

In South Africa, policy and legislation are in favour of community engagement being recognised as one of the key elements of tertiary institutions that ought to take precedence along with research, training and teaching (Ferreira & Ebersöhn, 2012). The promulgation of the *Education White Paper 3* (Department of Education, 1997) contributed to an enriched understanding of community service as not separate from but rather intertwined with teaching and research, "infusing and enriching the latter two higher education functions with a sense of context, relevance and application" (HEQC, 2006, p.10). The traditional view of the university as "an ivory tower that imparts knowledge for its own sake" is being replaced by the idea of universities as "inclusive institutions in the service of the community" (Le Roux & Mitchell, 2008, pp.55-56).

The national context in which partnerships between higher education institutions and communities are embedded ought to be central to our understanding of the potential change that can be expected in these communities (Strier, 2011). Furthermore, on-going partnerships demand increased understanding of the contexts of the partners involved in order to avoid the pitfall of creating expectations that are left unmet (Mitchell & Rautenbach, 2005). By investing in the development of its capacity to partner and critically evaluate the relationship between partners, higher education can streamline ASL in South Africa and strengthen its impact on the lives of rural communities (Mitchell & Rautenbach, 2005).

Literature suggests that higher education community engagement partnerships are central to the efficacy of ASL and volunteerism (Le Roux & Mitchell, 2008). According to Ndlovu (2011),

university-school partnership strategies with a focus on the enhancement of learners' school performance has been researched and documented in national and international literature. However, the impact of such a partnership on the psychosocial well-being of learners in a rural school context has received less attention in research endeavours. Ebersöhn, Eloff, and Swanepoel-Opper (2010) posit that postgraduate students in educational psychology can explore different roles and develop societal awareness by actively participating in community-based research. This provides further impetus for a study that can provide insight into ASL for educational psychology students who have completed their studies and are now working in diverse contexts.

2.4.1 Rural schools

Rural communities in South Africa have been marked by adversities, including resource-constraints (Mayekiso & Tshemese, 2007). Some of the specific challenges faced by South African schools in rural settings include extreme poverty, illiteracy and unemployment, inaccessibility to health/social services, as well as loss, grief, and child-headed households as a result of HIV/AIDS (Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2012). These societal factors have resulted in a vast amount of psychological problems and stressors that need to be addressed urgently in the macro system (Ebersöhn et al., 2010). Although urban areas share some of the challenges that are pertinent in rural environments, the intensity of these challenges in rural contexts exceeds that of urban settings (Balfour, Mitchell, & Moletsane, 2011).

Furthermore, the inequalities that were prevalent during Apartheid contributed to socio-economic factors that have rendered educational psychological support insufficient on school- and community levels (Engelbrecht, 2004). Support from the Department of Education is often limited in rural settings due to its remoteness, inadequate transport and infrastructure, as well as a general sense of neglect (Balfour et al., 2011). Balfour et al. (2011, p.23) assert that in order to increase our understanding of systematic challenges in rural areas (and by implication, rural schools), we are required to move beyond a "common sense empathy" for these communities towards an active engagement and partnering with them.

The needs expressed by rural schools and the value of partnerships for these schools, are similar to urban schools in their efforts to develop and enhance resilience of learners (Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2012). Higher education institutions are becoming increasingly aware of their role and responsibility towards rural schools. Alexander and Khabanyane (2013) argue that ASL theory and practice as part of the training of educators, has the potential to shape the process of social change in school settings by providing educators and school management with new ways of conceptualising teaching and learning. By encouraging a

29

culture of reflection, ASL equips educators with integrating knowledge, skills and resources necessary to develop "authentic community-engagement initiatives" (Alexander & Khabanyane, 2013, p.111).

Establishing relationships between the school and the wider community becomes a way of determining the much-needed resources for teachers, learners and families alike (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). Edwards (2015) underscores the need for psychologists to generate knowledge on and provide services to rural settings and communities in the country. By researching ASL within the context of a higher-education rural school partnership, this study aims to address the gap in current literature regarding psychology-based research and intervention in marginalised communities in South Africa.

2.4.2 Types of partnerships

Bringle and Hatcher (2002) contend that different types of university-school partnerships are defined by the relationships within the partnership, which can either be understood on a personal (i.e. how individuals in the partnerships relate to one another) or on an institutional level. The establishment of suitable partners for a collaborative partnership should be based on an overlap between the needs and resources of the community and service partners, and the institution's goals for ASL and development (HEQC, 2006).

De Lange (2012) advocates for institutions in South Africa to be allowed to pursue different avenues of engaging with communities and that the kind of engagement will depend on several factors unique to the institution, including the type of institution, the academic mission and the programs offered. In a case study of a comprehensive university in South Africa, a framework for community engagement was conceptualised that provides an outline of core mechanisms with associated engagement activities that can guide community engagement partnerships (De Lange, 2012). According to this framework, engagement can be driven on four platforms, namely: community interaction, service and outreach; professional/discipline-based service provision; teaching and learning; and research and scholarship (De Lange, 2012).

2.4.3 Collaboration as a key asset in partnerships

The mutual need for collaboration can path the way for educational and societal transformation, if managed and monitored effectively. Collaborative partnerships have the power to build resilience in the form of a "systemic resource-net" in the face of continued adversity (Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2012, p.39). Thorkildsen and Stein (1996, as cited in Ndlovu, 2011, p.1413) argue that a university and its partnership schools have the potential to become

30

"each other's best resource" and achieve shared goals. John (2006) stresses the importance of *mutually beneficial* higher education community engagement partnerships in developing countries such as South Africa. To ensure successful implementation of educational partnerships among universities and schools, the critical elements seem to be "extensive collaboration, reflection, and continued revision" by all participants (Peel et al., 2002, p.319).

If higher education community engagement partnerships are to achieve its outcomes, it is vital that all partners (including students) develop a thorough understanding and deep appreciation of the partnership (Le Roux & Mitchell, 2008). For community development to be optimal, all partners need to be consulted throughout the ASL process (Van Schalkwyk & Erasmus, 2011). By actively engaging with all role players in co-constructing meaning from partnerships, the current trend worldwide of educational partnerships that form, only to fizzle out shortly after and be replaced with new partnerships (Peel et al., 2002), can be circumvented.

Lazarus, Erasmus, Hendricks, Nduna, and Slamat (2008) accentuates the importance of promoting multi-layered collaboration within and between higher education institutions, as well as between relevant organisations on national and international platform. The growing field of community engagement necessitates research on the development and outcomes of curricular community engagement by involving students, lecturers, service providers and communities alike (Bender, 2008). Peel et al. (2002) supports the value of research that contributes to our understanding of what makes educational partnerships flourish or flounder from the perspectives of all partners involved. While this study aims to explore students' experiences of ASL in order to inform future partnerships, the perspectives of the other community engagement beneficiaries of the university-rural school partnership (i.e. teachers, learner-clients, parents and researchers) are also in the process of being documented as part of a larger study and will then be integrated into a final study of all relevant stakeholders.

2.5 TRAINING OF PSYCHOLOGISTS

2.5.1 Global trends in psychology training

Silbereisen and Ritchie (2014) underscore the onus that rests upon psychology educators to prepare the next generation of psychologists for continuously changing societies and cultures worldwide. Globally, cultural and social contexts have increasingly formed part of knowledge generation and practica in psychology that has led to a growing appreciation of diversity and consequently influenced the training of psychologists by turning the focus to cultural competence (Silbereisen & Ritchie, 2014).

In 2003, the American Psychological Association (APA) introduced the *Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists*. These guidelines reflected the trajectory of psychology against the backdrop of macro changes in society with a specific focus on the needs of those who have been "marginalized or disenfranchised within and by psychology based on their ethnic/racial heritage and social group identity or membership" (APA, 2003, p.377). Although these guidelines were primarily based on the changes that were taking place in the US and its commonwealths, the authors acknowledged the relevance of this document for the global context (APA, 2003).

In contrast to the original notion of psychology as strongly relying on "Western, Eurocentric, and biological perspectives and assumptions" which tended to neglect the significant role of socio-cultural dynamics, scholars and researchers in the mid-1980s began advocating for a more 'culture-centred' approach to the training and education of psychologists (APA. 2003, pp.386 & 395). In addition to the call for multicultural practices to be embedded in psychology training, the APA (2003) also highlights the importance of considering the changing global context for psychology practice and training that is influenced by external societal forces such as genetic research breakthroughs, environmental climate change and worldwide trends in terrorism.

Internationally, psychologists are encouraged to dovetail research and practical efforts in co-constructing solutions leading to transformation by partnering with rural communities. Jameson and Blank (2007) conceive the role of mental health care in rural settings as two-fold: on the one hand conducting research on the challenges faced by individuals living in these settings and on the other hand implementing innovative solutions that can impact the rural communities directly. Gross (2005, p.299) notes that "although practica play an important role in current psychology training and may assume an even larger role in the future, relatively little is written about practica in the literature". African scholars in particular are urged to generate knowledge that will contribute to the global body of knowledge on community psychology theory and practice (Seedat & Lazarus, 2014).

2.5.2 Training psychologists in rural South Africa

Psychology training in South Africa has reflected the socio-political developments in the history of the country (Pillay & Kramers-Olen, 2014). Professional training was aligned to Apartheid policies pre-1994. This led to "the unequal distribution and emphasis of mental health services and training opportunities between White and Black communities and urban and non-urban communities" (Pillay & Kramers-Olen, 2014, p.365). Twenty years into democracy, the

32

country continues to face the 'triple challenge' of poverty, unemployment and social inequality (The Presidency, 2014). Ebersöhn and Ferreira (2012) elucidate the adverse effects these challenges are having on teachers, learners, and families of rural schools in resource-constrained settings in particular.

Mazibuko (2005, p.85) maintains that social sciences and humanities community-based initiatives have a pivotal part to play in a "post-apartheid and globalizing world". Pillay (2003) argues that institutional and structural changes are insufficient in generating transformation, and that personal, interpersonal, and cultural dimensions of change should receive equal attention in transformation efforts that should be reflected in the training of psychologists. Macleod (2004) agrees that psychology training should be geared towards recognising and addressing the socio-political concerns and accompanying psychological issues unique to South Africa. This places increased pressure on higher education to invest in the development of health and social services students that will enable them to work in "a context of diversity, continuing segregation and marked social inequalities" (Rohleder, Swartz, Carolissen, Bozalek, and Leibowitz, 2008, p.255).

Similar to other countries worldwide, clinical training of psychologists in South Africa has seen improved integration of community work into curricula over the years. This is illustrated in the heightened attention that has been given to rural and peri-urban areas as training contexts for formalised professional psychology education in the country (Pillay & Kometsi, 2007; Pillay & Kramers-Olen, 2014). This shift in the training of psychologists extends across all fields of psychology (Pillay, 2003), although South African literature remains mostly centred on clinical psychology (e.g. Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; Gibson et al., 2001; Pillay, Ahmed, & Bawa, 2013; Pillay & Kramers-Olen, 2014).

Engelbrecht (2004) argues that educational psychologists in South Africa are now widely recognised as agents of change within the national context due to their ability to respond to the needs of the learners and to enable inclusive practices in schools and communities. Adams, Collair, Oswald, and Perold (2004) comment on the need for research to be conducted by reflective practitioners in the field of educational psychology. In 2003, Pillay explored the lived experiences of 1st and 2nd year Master's students in Educational Psychology who participated in a community psychology module, as well as educational psychologists who were trained as such at the same university over the past seven years. Based on the results of this qualitative study, Pillay (2003) concluded that there is a definite need for integrating community psychology into future training within the South African context.

In a separate study by Ebersöhn et al., (2010), a small group of MEd. Educational Psychology students' experiences of community engagement as part of their ASL practicum, were

explored. Based on the benefits reported by these students, the recommendation was made for ASL to form an integral part of educational psychology students' training in order to provide a platform for applying community psychology theories in a real-life context and for other related theories to be included into appropriate curriculum. Ebersöhn et al. (2010) suggested that educational psychology practicums should aim to equip students to contribute to the construction of new knowledge and theory that will address the adversities typically experienced by marginalised communities.

At the time of conducting this research study, literature that provides a systematic overview of the specific community engagement activities presented by the various universities in the country who offer postgraduate degrees in Educational Psychology was lacking. However, an investigation into the various universities' postgraduate programs in the educational psychology departments revealed that ASL was being incorporated to some extent by all the universities in the country that offer courses in this field of study. Community engagement programs for psychology students ranged from projects aimed at providing psycho-educational services to learners at schools in informal settlements (Ebersöhn, 2014; Diale, 2013) to therapeutic horse riding activities (Naidoo, 2012) and school readiness testing (Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, 2013). These programs vary depending on the unique character of the university and community contexts within which it functions. This is in line with the general trend in higher education in South Africa to strive towards a "differentiated higher education system which allows for differentiated interpretations of engagement" (De Lange, 2012, p.95).

From the above discussion it becomes clear that postgraduate students in educational psychology (and other fields of psychology), along with other relevant partners in curricular community engagement, must assume an active role in the facilitation of community engagement and resilience-promoting partnerships. By exploring students' perceptions of their ASL training as part of a community-university partnership, the knowledge gained from this study could guide the construing of similar partnerships into the curriculum in the future.

2.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The main theory that will guide my research is Transformative Learning Theory. Percy (2005, p.130) argues that Transformative Learning Theory is useful in enhancing our insight into "the learning processes and changes in meaning perspectives" that are associated with participatory research and extension. Hullender et al. (2015) argue that more research is needed on the impact of transformative learning on service-learning experiences.

In short, transformative learning (developed by Mezirow and his associates) provides a "uniquely adult, abstract and idealized" theory of learning (Taylor, 2007, p.173). Mezirow (1997, p.11) describes the process of transformative learning as "transforming frames of reference through critical reflection of assumptions, validating contested beliefs through discourse, taking action on one's reflective insight, and critically assessing it." Mezirow's theory of transformative learning is rooted in constructivist ideas of knowledge and learning (Dirkx, 1998). Central to Mezirow's theory is the premise that people have to understand the meaning of their experiences and in order to do so adults need to develop autonomous thinking through transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997). In his theory, Mezirow (1996, as cited in Taylor, 2007) views learning as a process whereby future action is guided by reconstruction of the interpretation of the meaning of experience. According to Dirkx (1998, p.4) meaning-making forms an integral part of this mode of inquiry through "reflection, critical reflection, and critical self-reflection." This study investigates the phenomenon of transformative learning by exploring how students make meaning of their ASL experiences a year or more after their ASL practicum.

While Mezirow's transformative learning theory maintains that cognitive processes (including meaning perspectives, frames of reference, and habits of mind) are of paramount importance in transformations, with emotional and social dimensions receiving less attention, Illeris (2014) builds on this notion and proposes an extended, more comprehensive understanding of the transformative learning concept.

Illeris (2003) conceptualises the learning concept as structural, consisting of two processes and three dimensions. According to Illeris (2003), the two integrated, yet very different, processes that encompass learning are interaction processes and acquisition processes of which both must be activated to produce learning. *Interaction processes* involve the learner and his/her surroundings, while *acquisition and elaboration processes* are internal mental processes that integrate the interaction process with previous knowledge. Illeris (2004) argues that cognitive, social and emotional dimensions of learning all need to be integrated for learning to be understood comprehensively.

Illeris (2004, pp.81-83) elaborates on the three main dimensions or domains of learning by looking at their role and function within the learning process. The *cognitive domain* (learning content dimension) is primarily occupied with the broadening of a learner's knowledge and skills base. It enables meaning-making and develops the learner's ability to deal with adversities, contributing to an "overall personal functionality". The *emotional domain* is conceptualised as a dimension that consists of "mental energy, feelings and motivations" that ensure the development of "mental balance and personal sensitivity". The *social domain* is

35

focused on "external interaction" with the environment and encompasses "participation, communication and cooperation". It develops the learner's "personal integration" and "sociality" and is dependent on the activation of both the emotional and cognitive dimensions.

These three fundamental elements together lead to competence, which can be defined as "human potentials to cope with handling and solving current as well as future problems" (Illeris, 2004, p.80). Figure 2.2 is a visual representation of the processes and dimensions of learning (Illeris, 2004, p.82). The triangle illustrates what Illeris (2004, p.83) perceives as "the tension field of learning in general and of any specific learning event or learning process" which encompasses the learner's emerging functionality, sensitivity and sociality (i.e. "competence").

COGNITION **EMOTION**

FUNCTIONALITY SENSIBILITY
meaning Acquisition mental
ability balance

Interaction

SOCIALITY
integration

ENVIRONMENT

SOCIETY
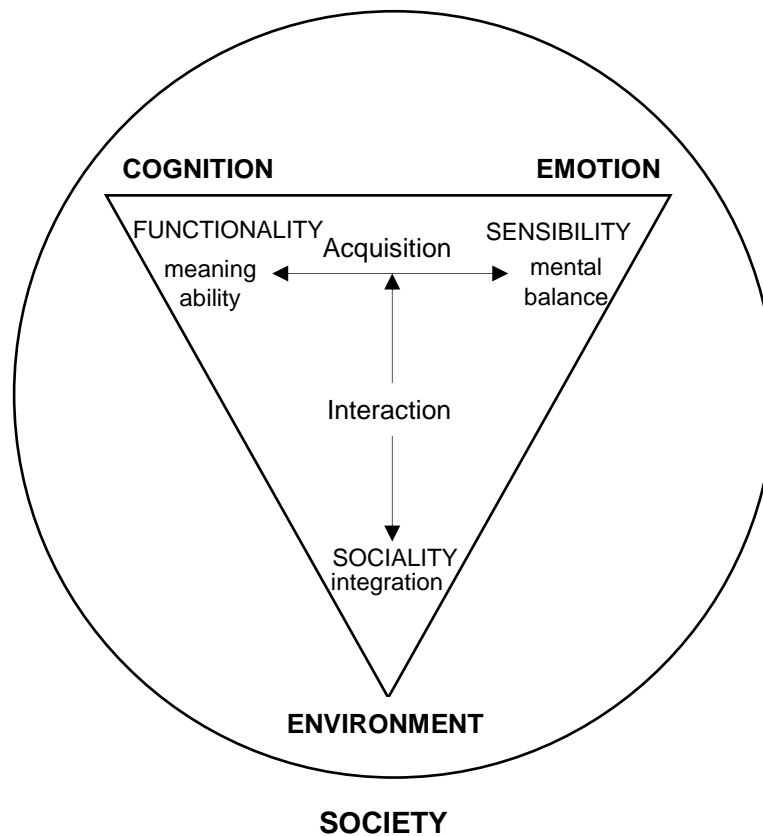
Figure 2.2. Learning processes and dimensions (Illeris, 2004, p.82).

The qualities emphasised by transformative learning, namely "personal development, deeper understanding, and increased tolerance and flexibility" have the potential to complement the learning traditionally associated with academic and professional qualifications by adding depth and insight to the learning process (Illeris, 2015, p.50). Illeris (2015) maintains that the fast-changing nature of today's society highlights the need for transformative learning. In preparing

36

psychology students for practice in multicultural settings, Ileris' (2004) understanding of learning processes and dimensions provides a useful way of gaining insight into the development of personal and professional identity within a diverse and dynamic societal context.

Mezirow's transformational learning framework is instrumental in theorising about service-learning due to its ability to explain how people construct meaning from experiences, how these meanings can result in transformation, and how reflection in tandem with meaningful dialogue, can result in action geared towards social justice (Kiely, 2005). Essentially, transformative learning becomes a way of "understanding adults' learning as a meaning-making process aimed at fostering a democratic vision of society and self-actualisation of individuals" (Dirkx, 1998, p.9). Kiely (2005) draws attention to the importance of understanding the contextual factors specific to the ASL program (e.g. 'program characteristics', 'historical relationships' and 'personal biographies') that interact with different types of dissonance and learning that occur during transformative learning in order to prepare for students' responses and plan for future ASL programs.

Transformative Learning Theory provides a theory for understanding educational psychology students' reflections of their own learning experiences, as well as how these reflections can be used to co-construct knowledge in the service of future partnerships. Therefore, students in this study will be seen as active participants in the process of co-creating knowledge as social acts that help us make sense of their experiences (Dirkx, 1998). As the students reflect on their experiences of ASL, their perspectives add further dimensions to our understanding of higher education community engagement, thus supporting the democratic principles promoted in South Africa, while at the same time promoting self-actualisation through the process of critical self-reflection.

2.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter allowed me to position my study within a theoretical framework and existing knowledge on the topic. This study represents a contribution to the growing national and international body of knowledge that clarifies the role of students' experiences of ASL within a higher education-rural school partnership context. South African literature shows that there exists a growing need to advance the area of research pertaining to school-community partnerships in rural areas and students' perspectives on and opinions of ASL in such partnerships. If training of postgraduate students in Educational Psychology is to become a more collaborative process for meaningful intervention that enhances the role of educational

psychologists in an unequal society, the experiences of students who have been involved in ASL programs become essential in shaping future training and partnerships.

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3.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 2 I provided an overview of the theoretical framework that guided my study. This chapter provides a discussion of the methodological choices in this study. The chapter commences with a discussion of the purpose of the study. The paradigmatic assumptions contained within the parameters of the research questions are then explored, followed by a description of the research design. Hereafter, I explain the methodological choices I made with regard to data collection and -analysis, exploring the strengths and limitations of these choices and elaborating on my attempts to address the particular challenges. This chapter will conclude with the ethical guidelines I endeavoured to follow, and the quality criteria strategies I adopted.

3.2 PARADIGMATIC LENSES

3.2.1 Metatheoretical paradigm

Constructivism is the epistemological paradigm I use as the lens in the study. Constructivism suggests that knowledge is invented and developed as interpretations of experience (McWilliams, 2012) and that people construct their worlds of experience through cognitive processes (Young & Collin, 2004). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), constructivism is transactional and subjectivist, with the researcher and participants jointly creating the findings as the investigation advances. The HEQC (2006, p.14) asserts that ASL is "rooted in the theories of constructivism".

In accordance with the underlying aims of the study, constructivism ensured the richest possible insight into how previous cohorts of educational psychology students experienced ASL in the partnership. The constructivist paradigm allowed for a platform for dynamic interaction with participants which provided a frame for understanding their lived experiences. Detailed accounts of participants' personal experiences of ASL were used to construct new knowledge which could inform higher education community engagement in the future.

The main challenge with this approach was that as a researcher, I had to be cautious of unknowingly imposing my own subjective interpretations of constructed meaning on the participants. I addressed this challenge by giving my participants a voice in the study and by

39

continuously remaining aware of how my own understandings might influence the final interpretation (Scotland, 2012).

3.2.2 Methodological paradigm

I selected a qualitative methodological approach as a suitable mode of inquiry for my study, which relies on our understanding of social reality. In order to make sense of phenomena in the social world, an approach was called for that would recognise its historical and political context, including people's actions, meaning-making, and experiences of power, structures, and agency (Hartas, 2010). The qualitative approach enabled me to collect data that could provide insight into participants' subjective experiences within the context of ASL.

Henwood and Pidgeon (1992, p.98-99) underscore a number of characteristics associated with qualitative methodology within the naturalistic paradigm that relates to the purpose of my study. Firstly, a qualitative approach supports the constructivist epistemologies in which this study was embedded. Secondly, it prefers description over explanation, which aligns with the exploratory and descriptive nature of my study. Thirdly, reality is explored from the participants' point of view and the meaning of participants' lived experiences are understood in depth and within context. Fourthly, findings of participants' experiences unfolded during the course of the study and pre-determined outcomes were not hypothesised at the outset. Finally, the use of qualitative methods (i.e. interviewing) in my study further exemplified a qualitative methodology.

The potential value of relying on qualitative methodology in this study, was its ability to further my understanding of the subjective, lived experiences of a rural school-educational psychology partnership from the perspective of the students. It allowed me to provide rich descriptions of the participants' retrospective experiences and the meaning attached to these experiences. It created a space for me to explore "themes" or "trends" of several participants' experiences and interactions through interviews (Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, & Morales, 2007), providing me with a general description that may inform similar partnerships in the future.

It must also be noted that, due to its subjective nature, qualitative methodology posed limitations which I aimed to address during the course of the study. The first limitation pertained to reflexivity which refers to the dynamic interplay of influence between the thoughts and actions of the participants and the researcher (Yin, 2016). I did not monitor, in a researcher diary, my subjective meaning-making as (i) researcher and (ii) researcher with my own prior experiences in the same projects as an ASL student. My own reflections as an ASL student (see Appendix A for extracts from my reflective journal during my ASL practicum) could thus

40

have informed the way in which I made meaning of and engaged with my study and participants, in a negative way.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN: INSTRUMENTAL CASE STUDY

3.3.1 Defining the instrumental case

A research design can be defined as "a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution or implementation of the research" (Durrheim, 2006, p.34). In this study, an instrumental case study design was utilised to reflect on participants' experiences of ASL. Case studies are a type of qualitative research design that encompass "intensive analyses and descriptions of a single unit or system bounded by space and time" (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, pp.9 & 11). When referring to a "bounded unit", Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013, p.11) imply persons, groups, institutions, and organisations as part of this unit.

The case study approach had particular relevance for my study, in which the case is defined as cohorts of Master's students in Educational Psychology as part of an existing school-based intervention (FLY). By employing a constructivist perspective, a case study design enabled me to study the way in which participants construct meaning of their experiences post-practicum and to co-create a rich and detailed account of ASL together with the participants. In Yin's (2009) two-fold definition of case studies, one of the critical features that are highlighted is that a case study design requires a research question demanding an extensive, comprehensive description of some contemporary social phenomenon within a real-life context. In this study, a case study design was applied to the social phenomenon of ASL at a rural school in Mpumalanga over the past 7 years and involved the convergence of multiple data collection strategies into coherent themes. By exploring and describing participants' experiences of the ASL practicum, the typical nature of the case study as providing thick descriptions and longitudinal insights (Lindegger, 2006), was acknowledged.

More specifically, an *instrumental case study* design was chosen for the purpose of this study. What distinguishes this type of case study from others, is that the case is instrumental in facilitating understanding of something else (i.e. the case is used as a means to an end, instead of an end in itself) (Grandy, 2010). In my study, the insights gained into educational psychology students' experiences were instrumental to inform knowledge on and insight into higher education community engagement. Furthermore, an instrumental case study attempts to emphasise a part of the case (i.e. the ways in which participants experience the distinct concept of ASL), as opposed to studying the case as a whole, as with an intrinsic case study design (Stake, 1995).

41

As explained by Flyvbjerg (2006, p.223) the close relationship between the case study and the real-life situation, as well as the detailed analyses, are advantageous to research as a "nuanced view of reality" can emerge which deepens our understanding of a phenomenon. A further advantage of using a case study design was that it enabled me to focus on the exploration of a specific partnership and related group of students, which contributed to a comprehensive and detailed description of ASL.

There were, however, also limitations to using a case study design. According to Lindegger (2006), one of the grounds on which case studies can be criticised, is that it is not able to generate knowledge that can be generalised. However, the emphasis of a qualitative, constructivist study was not to generalise, but rather to provide a unique, context-specific case of ASL that might potentially inform higher education community engagement between schools and universities. Flyvbjerg (2006, p.227) argues that just because findings from case study research "cannot be formally generalised, does not mean it cannot enter into the collective process of knowledge accumulation in a given field or in a society." Flyvbjerg (2006) notes that another potential limitation is the common perception that case studies have a tendency to be biased, since the researcher looks for trends that will verify his/her subjective ideas about the findings.

Being aware of these foreseen challenges, strategies were implemented to prevent these limitations from affecting the quality of the study. By providing thick descriptions of the case, context and research process, provision was made for findings to be transferred to other, similar contexts. In order to avoid bias and subjectivity, findings were discussed with peers and supervisors, and member checking was conducted.

3.3.2 Convenience sampling of the case

I conveniently selected seven cohorts of previous ASL students from the FLY project for the case in this study. Convenience sampling can be described as the on-going process whereby the cases that are most convenient to obtain are selected until the desired sample size is reached (Welman, Kruger, & Mitchell, 2005). Availability and accessibility at the time of data collection were the key considerations in selecting the case respondents (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

Convenience sampling has the advantage of being time- and cost-effective when compared to other sampling techniques (Welman et al., 2005; Creswell, 2007), but information and credibility can be compromised (Creswell, 2007). Another disadvantage of convenience sampling is that the researcher's control over the sampling of the case is limited as the process relies on the respondents that will be easiest to obtain (Welman et al., 2005). This case is

very unlikely to be representative of a wider group of students and therefore findings were not generalised to a larger population (Cohen et al., 2011). Furthermore, Flyvbjerg (2006, p.229) emphasises the significance of selecting "some few cases chosen for their validity" over larger, randomised samples that aim at representativeness, but provide little insight into cases.

3.3.3 Contextualising the case

The case can be referred to as a bounded system that is unique to the topic of study. The conveniently sampled case consisted of the FLY project, of which one focus is ASL. ASL at the rural school in Mpumalanga, as part of the on-going FLY school-based intervention, has been continuing since 2006. The project is a long-term partnership between teachers and learners in a secondary school in a rural area of Mpumalanga on the one hand, and students and researchers aligned with the Centre for Study of Resilience, UP, on the other hand.

The FLY project forms part of Master's students' year-long clinical training module, OPR 800 (Ebersöhn, 2014). The aim of the FLY partnership is to provide a platform to generate knowledge on (i) resilience in rural schools, (ii) community engagement and ASL, as well as (iii) educational psychology services in rural schools. Knowledge generation coincides with mutuality of benefits to school-partners, students-in-training, and collaborating researchers.

The long-term research site with whom the research team has been partnering, is located in Mpumalanga and can be seen as representative of rural schools in this province: mainly agricultural livelihood characterised by extreme poverty and isolated from basic services, with high incidences of HIV infection and AIDS-related loss (De Jongh, 2013). Figure 1.1. shows a map of the surrounding area in which the secondary school is situated. Note the remote location next to the bordering Swaziland mountain range.

Photograph[3] 3.1 and 3.2 depict the resource-constrained rural environment within which the school is situated, while Photograph 3.3 depicts the school infrastructure and Photograph 3.4 the school building.

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[3] All photographs were taken at the practicum site and supplied to me by the site supervisor. Ethical approval was obtained for the use of these photographs for research purposes.

Photograph 3.1: School environment

Photograph 3.2: School environment

Photograph 3.3: School infrastructure

Photograph 3.4: School building

Second year Master's students in Educational Psychology from UP have been involved in providing educational psychology services (incl. assessment, therapy, and psycho-educational support) annually as part of their clinical training module, OPR 800 (Ebersöhn, 2014). The rural school ASL-practicum provides a platform for students to practically apply, analyse, synthesise, and evaluate acquired educational psychology knowledge and understanding of theory (Ebersöhn, 2014). A total of 93 students have completed their rural school practicums from 2006 to 2013, with an average of 12 students visiting the school annually.

During these visits, students engage in group-based educational psychology activities with their clients, the Grade 9 learners (Ebersöhn, 2014). Students usually meet with the clients outside of the classrooms, often moving between individual encounters with clients while facilitating more interactive activities in a small group context. Photograph 3.5 and 3.6 show educational psychology students engaging with clients individually and in small-group context at the participating school during their ASL practicum in 2014. Photograph 3.6 shows a client working on a sand tray to create a story in the sand, which he will then later share with the student who is observing him.

Photograph 3.5: ASL in action

Photograph 3.6: Client working on a sand-tray

3.4 PARTICIPANT SAMPLING

3.4.1 Sampling technique and selection process

Second year MEd Educational Psychology students from 2006 to 2013, who did their practicum at the partner-school, were invited electronically via email (L. Ebersöhn, personal communication, 25 July, 2014) to participate in the study. An example of the invitation is captured in Appendix C. Participants were purposefully selected based on the following selection criteria to include students who could contribute to rich, diverse, and multiple perspectives of experiences:

- Former UP students who have completed their Educational Psychology practicum at the rural school in the last 8 years since the start of the project in 2006.

- Participants were purposefully selected for diversity representativeness, i.e. year, age, gender, race, and language.

Purposive sampling, a non-probability technique, exemplifies qualitative studies where a particular purpose directs the sampling (Maree & Pietersen, 2007). By choosing participants purposefully I was able to target students who could potentially contribute rich, multiple perspectives of data based on their personal experiences of their practicum. I purposefully selected 22 participants of a total sample of 93 (see Table 3.1) who partook in ASL as students during their practicum year at UP.

Although the sample size was restricted to 22 participants (24% of the total number of ASL students in FLY over the past 8 years), the aim of non-probability sampling is to not generalise findings and make conclusive statements based on large numbers of participants (Maree & Pietersen, 2007). Instead, the aim is to produce a sample that represents certain characteristics of a small cross-section of the population (Battaglia, 2008). Non-probability

sampling can therefore be conceptualised as a subjective process, which poses a challenge to the quantification of the characteristics of the sample (Battaglia, 2008).

Table 3.1: Composition of research participants according to cohort

Year cohort	Number of ASL students in year cohort	Number of sampled ASL participants	% Representation of year-cohort participants	% Representation in total of 22 sampled participants
2006	11	0	0	0
2007	13	3	23	14
2008	10	1	10	5
2009	11	5	46	23
2010	12	5	42	23
2011	12	4	33	18
2012	14	1	7	5
2013	10	3	30	14
TOTAL:	**93**	**22**		

3.4.2 Composition of participants

Information about former students was obtained from the database at the Department of Educational Psychology of UP, which included contact lists of students from the MEd groups. A group photograph of each cohort at the ASL site was also attached to support students' recollection of the time spent at the school (photographs 3.7 -3.13). Participants received an electronic invitation (Appendix C), along with a demographic questionnaire (Appendix D), informed consent form (Appendix B) and questionnaire (Appendix E). The FLY project leader, who has been involved in the partnership from the start, established the first line of contact with the participants and introduced the study and the researcher to them. The decision about how participants would like to share their experiences resided with them.

None of the 2006 cohort responded to participate in the study. A contributing factor could be that many of the 2006 students' contact information was outdated. ASL experiences generated were thus limited to students from the past seven years (2007 – 2013). As cohorts were represented differently, a slightly unequal distribution of participants over the years existed, with 2008 and 2012 having the lowest, and 2009 and 2010 the highest percentage of the cohort population represented (see Table 3.1). Every cohort from 2007 onwards had at least one participant representing the specific year group.

46

Photograph 3.7: The 2007 cohort

Photograph 3.8: The 2008 cohort

Photograph 3.9: The 2009 cohort

Photograph 3.10: The 2010 cohort

Photograph 3.11: The 2011 cohort

Photograph 3.12: The 2012 cohort

Photograph 3.13: The 2013 cohort

The sample encompassed participants with diverse experiences, perspectives, and demographics across various cohorts to ensure a range of perspectives. The demographic questionnaire (refer to Appendix D) was used to gain information about participants' gender, age, ethnicity, language proficiency, geographical location, year of practicum, and level of postgraduate education. Table 3.2 illustrates the profile of participants in this study.

The majority of participants were female (18), while only four males participated in this study. The 22 students who participated were between the ages of 25 and 43, with an average age of 33. Fifteen participants were White, three Black, two Coloured, and two Indian. The distribution of participants' language indicated that most participants considered themselves to be proficient in either Afrikaans (3), English (9) or both (9). One student indicated proficiency in six official languages. With regard to the different data gathering methods, sixteen participants completed the questionnaire electronically, four participants took part in face-to-face interviews, one participant took part in a telephonic interview, and one participant mailed the questionnaire to me.

In the demographic questionnaire, participants were asked to reflect on their career as educational psychologists, the group of learners at the rural school that they provided services to, current involvement in the FLY project, as well as views on the partnership. Just more than half of the participants' career experience included working at a school at some point, while just less than half of the participants have worked in private practice. Half of the participants have had experience in providing a service at a tertiary institution during their career. Tertiary involvement included full-time as well as part-time lecturing, student development and support, e-tutoring, with one participant having completed her internship at a tertiary institution. One participant indicated that she had worked for the Department of Basic Education in her internship year, while another participant (no.13) had worked as a non-governmental organisation (NGO) consultant.

Only two participants (nos 2 & 11) did not list any community engagement or pro bono work as part of their career. Participants' involvement in community projects and rendering of services to marginalised communities varied. Participants' accounts of pro bono work included both assessment and intervention at schools and in private practice. Some examples of community work reported included providing services at children's homes and places of safety, programmes at community-based aftercare, parent and teacher guidance, youth development organisations at universities, church-based projects, volunteering at schools for children with disabilities, and affiliation with Child Welfare South Africa.

48

Table 3.2: Participant profile

Nr.	Year	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Language	Form of data collection
1	2007	M	43	White	Afrikaans	Face-to-face interview
2	2007	F	31	Black	English	Face-to-face interview
3	2007	F	34	White	Bilingual	Mailed questionnaire
4	2008	F	31	White	Bilingual	Electronic questionnaire
5	2009	F	33	White	Bilingual	Electronic questionnaire
6	2009	F	31	White	Bilingual	Electronic questionnaire
7	2009	F	30	White	Bilingual	Electronic questionnaire
8	2009	F	32	Indian	Bilingual	Telephonic interview
9	2009	F	30	White	Bilingual	Electronic questionnaire
10	2010	F	38	White	English	Electronic questionnaire
11	2010	F	31	Indian	English	Electronic questionnaire
12	2010	F	28	White	English	Electronic questionnaire
13	2010	F	39	Coloured	English	Electronic questionnaire
14	2010	F	35	White	Afrikaans	Electronic questionnaire
15	2011	M	31	White	Afrikaans	Electronic questionnaire
16	2011	M	27	Coloured	English	Face-to-face interview
17	2011	F	40	Black	English	Electronic questionnaire
18	2011	M	28	White	Bilingual	Face-to-face interview
19	2012	F	47	White	English	Electronic questionnaire
20	2013	F	25	Black	English/Zulu/Xhosa/ Sepedi/Sesotho/Setswana	Electronic questionnaire
21	2013	F	25	White	Bilingual	Electronic questionnaire
22	2013	F	30	White	English	Electronic questionnaire

Figures 3.1 through 3.4 provide a visual representation of the abovementioned demographics.
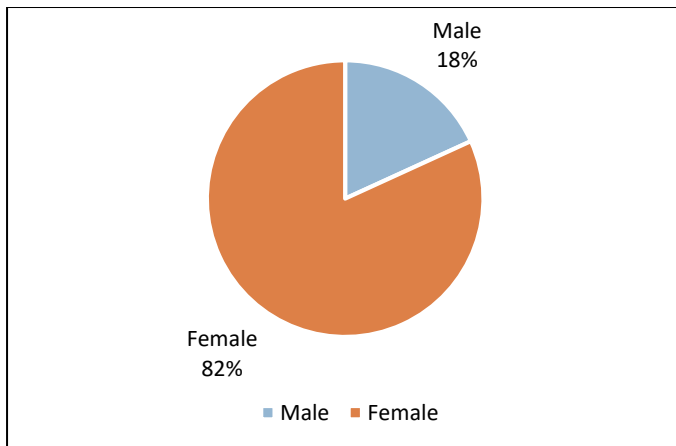
Figure 3.1: Gender of participants
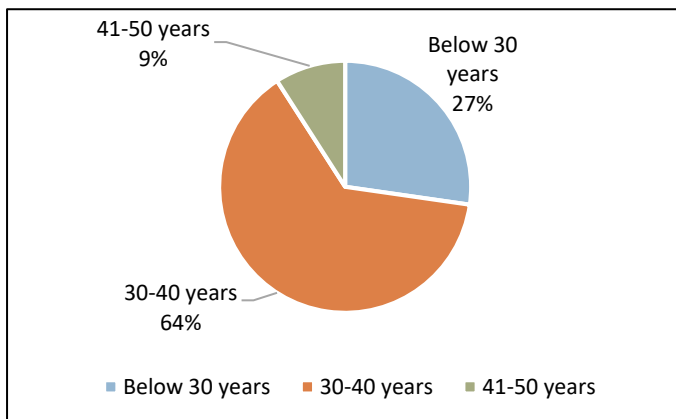
Figure 3.2: Age groups of participants
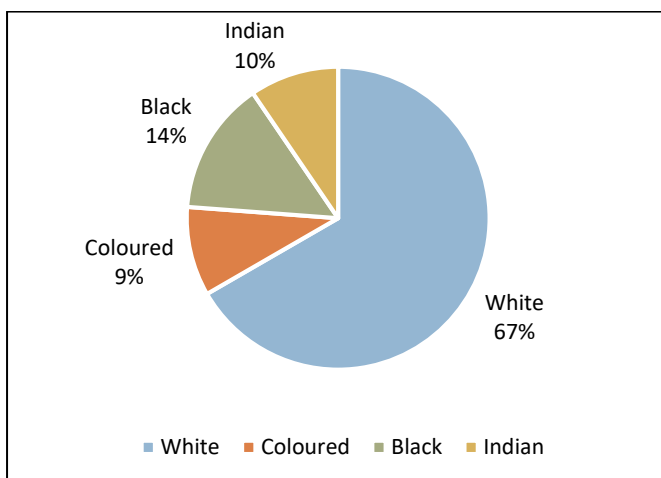
Figure 3.3: Ethnicity of participants

50
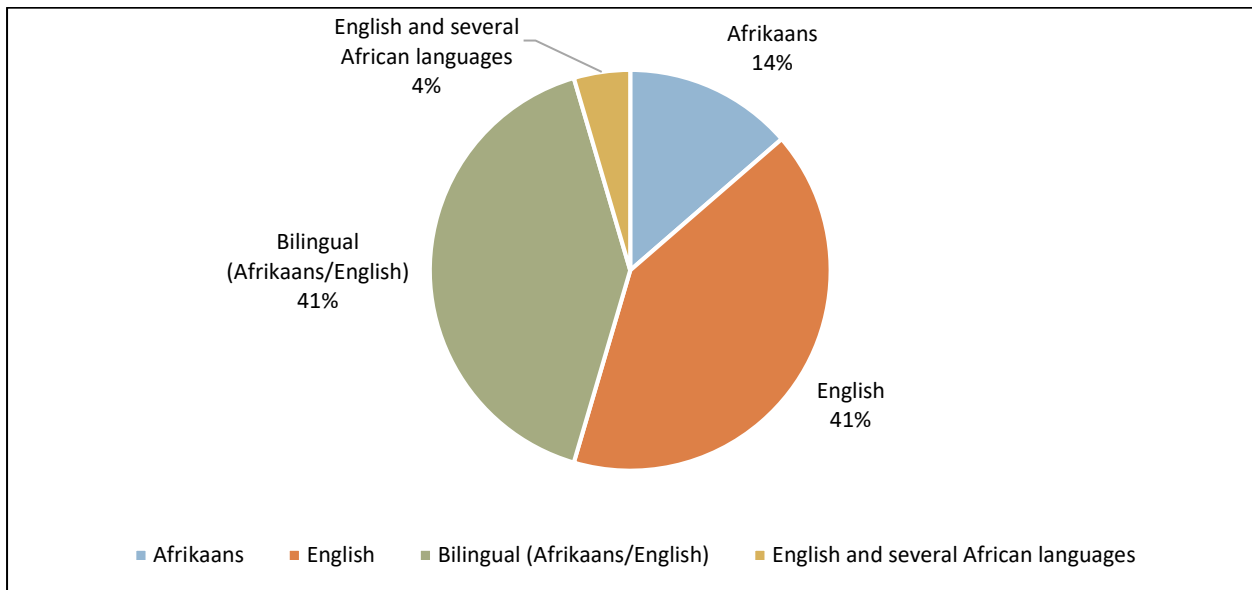
Figure 3.4: Language proficiency of participants

Most participants (15 in total) indicated that their highest level of postgraduate education is a Master's degree in Educational Psychology. Five participants (nos 1, 2, 8, 9, & 14) were in the process of completing their Doctoral degrees in Educational Psychology at the time of the study, while two participants (nos 21 & 22) were still in the process of completing their Master's degree dissertations. Geographical distribution of participants showed that the majority resided in Gauteng. Three participants (nos 12, 15, & 20) indicated that they lived in other provinces in South Africa, while one participant (no. 6) indicated that she currently lived in Tanzania.

The composition of the client groups that the participants engaged with at the secondary school during FLY, revealed that most students worked with client groups of between five and 10 clients, while four participants (nos 3, 4, 16, & 19) from different year groups had more than 10 clients in their group. Nine groups were mixed gender, nine groups were all boys, and four groups consisted of girls only. With regard to current involvement in the FLY project, two participants stated that they are currently involved in the FLY project for degree purposes. One participant (no. 9) was doing her PhD working with teachers who were part of FLY partnership to determine if the partnership contributes to establishing teacher resilience. Another participant (no. 21) was in the final stage of completing her Master's dissertation on the experiences of the parents and/or caregivers of the grade 9 learners taking part in the FLY project.

The final question of the demographic questionnaire asked participants to indicate what they believe the FLY partnership to be about. Participants' understanding of the partnership is summarised in Table 3.3 according to the percentage of participants who indicated the various categories. Six participants (nos 5, 7, 8, 11, 16, & 21) indicated "other foci" as part of their understanding and elaborated on what they believe the partnership to be about. These responses included cultural integration; the relevance of psychology's role in South Africa; identification and mobilisation of assets; and community-, teacher-, and learner development.

Table 3.3: Participants' understanding of the partnership

	Academic service learning	Post-graduate research	Higher education community engagement	Knowledge generation	Social justice
Number of participants	20	15	19	18	17
Percentage of participants	91	68	86	82	77

3.5 DATA COLLECTION AND DOCUMENTATION

3.5.1 Retrospective data on higher education community engagement

Semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were the data collection methods of choice. The same open-ended questions were used in both the semi-structured interviews and questionnaires to ensure consistency and uniformity (Seabi, 2012). These same questions were also used in related studies on the FLY project which aimed to explore and describe the retrospective experiences of various higher education community engagement beneficiaries involved in the partnership, namely, learner-clients, parents, researchers, and teachers.

The following open-ended questions retrospectively explored the issues of partnership as experienced by ASL students, including the challenges and successes:

- What do you know about the FLY partnership?
- What are the strengths of the FLY partnership?
- What are the limitations of the FLY partnership?
- What do you think is required for future planning in FLY?

An additional open-ended question was added to the basic questions in order to gain more insight into the benefits and shortcomings of ASL from the students' perspectives, since it plays a pivotal role in the FLY partnership:

- Please reflect on your retrospective experiences as ASL-student in the FLY project (i.e. what did you enjoy most in the short term, which gains have benefited you in the long-term, what did you find challenging, and what did you dislike).

The data collection methods were carefully selected to support the case study design, which required an in-depth exploration of the case, acknowledging its "complexity and context" (Seabi, 2012, p.83). These data collection methods were also informed by the other community engagement beneficiaries of the larger FLY project, namely, clients, parents, teachers, and researchers. Care was taken to ensure that the foci of the data generated by all the beneficiaries were comparable. Qualitative research methods, namely, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, were used to collect data on experiences of a rural school-educational psychology partnership. According to Tuckman and Harper (2012), questionnaires and interviews allow the researcher to study participants' knowledge on a subject, personal preferences, as well as attitudes and opinions. Questionnaires and interviews are considered to complement each other in collecting data in case study research (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013).

What distinguishes retrospective studies from other qualitative studies, is that an event or process is analysed retrospectively by participants who construct meaning from experiences according to their individual or collective life histories (Flick, 2009). Cohen et al. (2011), reporting on Schutz's (1962) idea of the meaning structure of the world, emphasise that meaning is only attributed to lived experiences retrospectively, through the process of reflection. Retrospective designs involve choosing participants that will be able to make a meaningful contribution to our understanding of the topic being studied (Flick, 2009). As previous students who were actively involved in the partnership, participants were carefully selected to provide relevant accounts based on authentic, hands-on experiences that could be used to understand the research questions.

One limitation of retrospective studies is that a person's present situation (at the time of data collection) might potentially influence recount of an earlier situation or interfere with the analysis of previous experiences (Flick, 2009). Since direct observation is not possible, a retrospective approach relies solely on participants' perspectives and therefore does not allow a process of developmental perspective of participants' experiences to unfold (Flick, 2009).

Data collection and documentation took place over a period of 25 weeks. The initial email (Appendix B) inviting students to participate was sent out on the 25th of July 2014 and the last interview took place on the 5th of February 2015. Face-to-face interviews were conducted at UP's Groenkloof Campus.

3.5.2 Semi-structured questionnaire

Based on the type of questions presented to participants, the questionnaire (Appendix E) used in this study can be described as semi-structured. A semi-structured questionnaire can be conceptualised as having a clear structure, sequence, and focus with an open-ended response format that allows respondents to communicate their experiences in their own words (Cohen et al., 2011). The semi-structured questionnaire "sets the agenda, but does not presuppose the nature of the response" (Cohen et al, 2011, p.382).

Open questions were suitable for the descriptive and exploratory nature of this study, as it did not limit respondents in terms of the length or nature of their responses and encouraged rich, authentic responses (Cohen et al., 2011). Since participants were expected to answer questions retrospectively, open questions invited them to reflect on their practicum and provide honest, personal comments based on their subjective experiences (Cohen et al., 2011). Since answers were not expected to be simple and straightforward, open-ended questions were useful to generate as many categories of response as possible (Cohen et al., 2011). Furthermore, open questions gave participants the opportunity to express themselves freely and to clarify and reshape their responses (Cohen et al., 2011).

Cohen et al. (2011) mention some of the potential disadvantages of open questions compared to closed questions: open questions may result in responses that contain unrelated and redundant information, it may be more time-consuming, the questionnaire may require more effort on the respondent's part, it may be difficult to find commonalities in diverse responses, and it is based on the assumption that all respondents are equally proficient in expressing their thoughts in a written format. In addition, the return rate of questionnaires is often slow (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013).

Since contact was established with participants via email, I was in a position to respond to participants' responses by asking for clarification and elaboration of answers. Although open-ended questions can take longer to complete and be more effortful than closed questions, participants were given ample time to respond to the questionnaire and were not pressurised to return the questionnaire within an unrealistic time frame. Participants were however sent a reminder of the questionnaire if they indicated that they would like to be part of the study. A

54

step-by step process was followed to facilitate the thematic analysis of responses, which made it easier to identify codes and themes even when responses were different. The issue of equity in terms of participants' articulation of their thoughts was not considered a limitation, since participants were all postgraduates in the same profession, which had a levelling effect on their writing proficiency. Return rates of questionnaires were slow initially, but improved as more contact was made with participants and rapport was established over time.

3.5.3 Semi-structured one-to-one interviews

Interviews are the preferred method of data collection in qualitative research studies (Greeff, 2011) and considered to be central in constructionist research (Kelly, 2006) as well as case study research (Yin, 2014). The one-to-one interviews (face-to-face and telephonic) were semi-structured, having fixed open-ended questions that guided the interview while at the same time remaining flexible and conversational in nature (Seabi, 2012). Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013) advocate that semi-structured interviews have an advantage over unstructured interviews in that it ensures some form of standardisation of questions without being overly rigid, which is helpful when comparing responses during the analysis stage. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore participants' personal experiences of ASL in greater detail whereas the focus of questionnaires was to enlarge my understanding of the case by contextualising the information obtained from the interviews (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013).

3.5.3.1 Face-to-face interviews

Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews follow a versatile approach to gathering data (Welman et al., 2005). An advantage of using face-to-face interviews was that a direct, social relationship between the researcher and participant was implicated, creating a platform for information sharing (Greeff, 2011). Another strength of the semi-structured face-to-face interview was that it allowed me to probe for clarification and encourage completion of all questions (Welman et al., 2005). These interviews yielded fruitful discussions, deepening my understanding of students' experiences of ASL, which would not have been possible had I relied on questionnaires alone. Since the participants in my study could not be directly observed in their natural setting, interviews were useful in providing insight into their experiences retrospectively (Creswell, 2014).

A possible limitation of semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, as pointed out by Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013), is that the pre-determined wording and sequence of questions may restrict the spontaneous unfolding of questions and responses that emerge during the

55

interview. Since the same basic set of questions are used for all participants, there is little room for individualising the interview to suit the needs and situation of the participant (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). Other concerns regarding interviews are that information provided is indirect and subjective to the interviewees, information is provided in a selected place instead of the original location, the researcher's presence may influence the participants, and some participants may have difficulty articulating their views and opinions (Creswell, 2014).

Although I kept to the same wording of the standardised questions with all participants, I was mindful of exploring participants' questions and responses that were relevant to the topic. Participants' responses during the interviews were subjective and filtered by their own experiences, and since the aim of the study was not to collect objective, generalisable data but rather to describe and explore unique experiences, the purpose of the study was not compromised. The concern regarding the natural setting was addressed by familiarising myself with the same rural school setting during my own ASL practicum, which allowed me to contextualise the participants' experiences. By corroborating data from the questionnaire, the bias effect of my presence was limited. Finally, participants were provided with the questionnaire before the start of the interview, so that they could familiarise themselves with the line of inquiry and to equalise differences in perception and articulation.

Creswell's (2014) interview protocol was used to guide my data recording procedures. Audiotaping of interviews was accompanied by handwritten notes during the interviews to prevent loss of data should audio equipment fail (Creswell, 2014). Audio recordings and verbatim transcriptions (refer to Appendix F) of the interviews were relied upon as documentation strategies, along with the completed questionnaires.

3.5.3.2 Telephonic interview

When face-to-face interviews pose challenges such as time constraints, distance, expenses, or unavailability of participants, telephonic interviews are often utilised as an alternative approach to talking to participants (Seidman, 2013). One of my participants wanted to take part in an interview but was unavailable for a face-to-face interview. Her circumstances warranted a different approach and she agreed to an interview by telephone. One of the advantages of a telephonic interview was that it was time-effective and therefore allowed my participant to take part in the study without placing high demands on her time schedule (Greeff, 2011). The telephonic interview also enabled me to make extensive notes and to ensure clarification and completion of all the questions (Greeff, 2011).

Greeff (2011) notes that semi-structured telephonic interviews might be limited in terms of length and amount of information that is disclosed. Furthermore, the "nuances of face-to-face

interaction" are often neglected in telephonic interviews (Greeff, 2011, p.357). Seidman (2013) adds to these limitations by arguing that telephonic interviews may compromise the reciprocity between researcher and participant that often develops more easily when meeting with participants face-to-face. This was addressed by making conscious efforts to connect with the participant and to build rapport by obtaining informed consent, scheduling, and conducting the interview (Seidman, 2013).

The telephonic interview was documented by writing down the participant's responses during the course of the interview. The completed questionnaire was then scanned and shared with the participant electronically for her to check the accuracy of responses and to provide the opportunity for her to add to or clarify any answers.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Data sources for analyses included 18 completed questionnaires and four verbatim transcriptions of audio-recorded face-to-face interviews. Thematic analysis as a form of inductive, interpretive analysis was used to analyse the data. This involved making sense of participants' responses by applying empathic understanding and "staying close to the data" (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Kelly, 2006, p.321). Qualitative data analysis enabled me to determine how participants retrospectively constructed meaning of their ASL practicums by "analysing their perceptions, attitudes, understanding, knowledge, values, feelings and experiences" (Nieuwenhuis, 2007, p.99).

According to Terre Blanche et al. (2006), the purpose of interpretive analysis is to provide a dense description of the topic being analysed. Since qualitative enquiry is concerned with the subjective experiences of people and the use of language and expression as a tool for understanding people (Terre Blanche et al., 2006), the interpretive element of thematic analysis assisted in clarifying students' experiences. By gaining an in-depth understanding of cases, the characteristics of the various cases could be compared (Seabi, 2012).

By using thematic analysis, I was able to identify, analyse, and report patterns or themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006) which enabled me to answer the research questions (see Appendix G for an example of thematic analysis). My thematic analysis plan was guided mainly by Braun and Clarke's (2006, p.87) phases: (i) familiarising myself with the data, (ii) generating initial codes, (iii) searching for themes, (iv) reviewing themes, (v) defining and naming themes, and vi) producing the report. The process of coding received special attention during my analysis of the data (see Appendix H). Babbie (2007, p.384) defines coding as "classifying or categorizing individual pieces of data" and distinguishes it as the "key process in the analysis of qualitative social research data".

57

Babbie (2007) explains that coding, along with a retrieval system, makes it possible to recover information that you might need later, such as data specific to a certain topic; making the data analysis procedure more efficient. Themes and subthemes were identified within and across cohorts, in order to allow comparison across data sets. Thematic analysis had the additional benefit of underlining both similarities and differences across the data sets (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which was of special importance in my study when comparing the experiences of the seven cohorts of students. To summarise, the data sets were thematically analysed, interpreted, compared with each other, and then integrated.

One potential challenge I faced by using thematic analysis pertained to flexibility. Although the flexibility of the method was an advantage in terms of it having plenty of options for analysis, it also meant that the potential range of themes that could be identified was broad (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This could be considered overwhelming when deciding which aspects of the data to concentrate on (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To rise to this challenge, I identified the themes that were the most prominent in the texts, and that were able to provide me with the most insight into my research questions. Another challenge arose during data interpretation. Since I was actively involved in making sense of the texts, my own values, preconceptions, and biases might have influenced the interpretation of responses and ultimately the themes of my study. One way to ensure the accuracy of my findings was member checking, where I reconnected with participants to establish whether they felt my descriptions of their experiences were truthful (Creswell, 2014).

3.7 QUALITY CRITERIA

True to the descriptive and exploratory nature of this study, the research methods were conceptualised using the metaphor of a crystal, proposed by Richardson (1994, 1997 as cited in Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The interweaving process of research can be compared to the properties of a crystal, as opposed to a triangle which is inflexible, static, and two-dimensional (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). By crystallising my data, using multiple cohorts and data collection methods, I applied triangulation to gain an in-depth, complex understanding of participants' distinct experiences over a time period. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005, p.963) describe the crystal imagery as follow:

> Crystals grow, change, and are altered, but they are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colours, patterns, arrays, casting off in different directions. What we see depends upon our angle of repose.

The framework for methodological rigor in my study was based on four general criteria outlined by Guba (1981) and Lincoln and Guba (1985), as a model of trustworthiness for naturalistic inquiries: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To implement the four-point criteria, applicable strategies proposed by Shenton (2004), Krefting (1991), and Seale (1999) were adopted in order to achieve rigor without compromising the relevance of the qualitative inquiry (Krefting, 1991). A summary of the quality criteria and related strategies that were employed can be found in Table 1.2.

3.7.1 Credibility

Credibility was promoted by applying well-established research methods that have proved successful in studies similar to mine (Shenton, 2004), i.e. qualitative data collection techniques and thematic analysis. Triangulation of data methods (i.e. semi-structured questionnaires and interviews) was useful in cross-checking data and interpretation; confirmation of data contributed to the comprehensiveness with which the phenomenon was studied (Krefting, 1991). By giving participants the opportunity to verify emerging themes, member checking was used to establish the accuracy with which their viewpoints were translated into data (Shenton, 2004; Krefting, 1991). Peers and supervisors were encouraged to review and give input on the study which provided me with new and valuable insights into refining my research design and improving my arguments (Shenton, 2004).

The case study design of my research demanded thick descriptions of the partnership and its context, which further contributed to the credibility of my study (Shenton, 2004). Another tactic to increase credibility was to take reasonable measures to ensure the honesty of participants during the interviews (Shenton, 2004). This was accomplished by ensuring that participants were participating freely and voluntarily, by encouraging truthful responses, and by creating a non-threatening environment where participants could openly express their opinions without fear of being criticised.

3.7.2 Transferability

Transferability can be explained as the extent to which findings are applicable to other situations to enable possible transference of findings to similar studies (Shenton, 2004). Since the case study is instrumental in informing future higher education community engagement, it can be argued that transferability needed to be addressed to some extent. This was ensured by giving a thick description of the setting and context in which the study took place in order to provide readers with adequate information to base a decision of applicability to other settings on (Seale, 1999).

59

3.7.3 Dependability

Dependability contributes to the trustworthiness of a study by reporting on the "consistency of findings." (Krefting, 1991, p.221). According to Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013), dependability can be enhanced by providing a detailed account of research procedures and justifying these actions. Dependability was met by using auditing, i.e. carefully documenting the research data, methods, decisions, and outcomes of the study (Seale, 1999). "Auditability suggests that another researcher could arrive at comparable conclusions given the same data and research context." (Krefting, 1991, p.221). Auditability was attended to by ensuring that other researchers will be able to replicate the research process step-wise in similar studies, which in turn also enhances the confirmability of the study (Shenton, 2004; Krefting, 1991).

3.7.4 Confirmability

Guba (1981), as cited in Krefting (1991), proposed data and interpretational confirmability as the qualitative equivalent of neutrality. Confirmability enables an external auditor to "to follow through the natural history or progression of events in a project to try to understand how and why decisions were made" (Krefting, 1991, p.221). One strategy used for establishing confirmability was triangulation of multiple cohorts of participants and data collection methods (Krefting, 1991), which was also employed as a strategy to ensure credibility.

However, the main strategy considered to establish confirmability is auditability (Krefting, 1991). This was useful in providing an in-depth description of the methodology that was followed in doing the research (Seale, 1999) and to ensure that findings were, as far as possible, a true reflection of participants' experiences and opinions (Shenton, 2004). Seale (1999, p.141) defines an audit trail as "a systematized approach to reflexive methodological accounting, incorporating peers in quite tightly specified roles during and after the research process, to provide a critique of the procedures used and a check on their clarity and consistency."

Table 3.4 indicates the specific categories of records that were included in my audit trail, based on the six categories of records identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985, as cited in Krefting, 1991).

Table 3.4: Record categories of audit trail (adapted from Lincoln and Guba, 1985, as cited in Krefting, 1991, p.221).

Audit category	Relevant documents
Raw data	• Questionnaires (Appendix E) • Audio recordings of face-to-face interviews • Verbatim transcriptions of face-to-face interviews (Appendix F)
Data reduction and analysis products	• Condensed notes and summaries of demographic data of participants • Emerging themes (Appendix G)
Data reconstruction and synthesis products	• Initial codes (Appendix H), emerging subthemes and themes (Appendix G) and cross-cohort analysis (Appendix I) • Interpretations and inferences regarding themes • Member checking conducted via email (Appendix J)
Process notes	• Notes on selection of research procedures and design
Materials related to intentions and dispositions	• Research proposal drafts and final proposal
Instrument development information	• Questionnaires (Appendix E)

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Allan (2011, p.288), all research endeavours levy a cost on society and participants and for this reason it can be argued that "no research is justified if participants or society as a whole will not benefit from it." This concern was addressed in my study since the findings could be put to use in informing future higher education community engagement efforts which will benefit all role players. I abided by the ethical principles commonly shared by psychologists worldwide, as outlined in Allan (2011), namely, respect for the dignity and rights of people, justice, autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, veracity, fidelity, and responsibility. Ethical principles were applied in three primary actions involved in the research process, suggested by Elias and Theron (2012, p.149): "providing truly informed consent,

determining and articulating risks and benefits, and selecting research participants in fair and equitable ways."

This study formed part of the FLY project for which ethical approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of UP and I abided by the ethical principles as outlined by their Ethics Committee. In addition, my ethical conduct as a Master's student in Educational Psychology was guided by the ethical code of the HPCSA.

3.8.1 Informed consent

Requirements for obtaining informed consent, as outlined in the Health Professions Act of 1974, were met by ensuring that research participants were aware of the voluntary nature of participation and that consent was given freely and without coercion or influence. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and information clearly communicated to participants regarding aims of the research project, the fact that the study formed part of a larger study, use of data for research purposes, and termination of study participation. Prospective participants were given detailed information of what would be expected during the research activities and were given the platform to ask clarifying questions. In addition, consent was obtained to make use of audio recordings.

Firstly, I obtained written informed consent from the Dean of Groenkloof Campus, Faculty of Education, UP, to conduct this research. Secondly, I obtained written informed consent from the research participants (Appendix B).

3.8.2 Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity

As this study required participants to share their experiences and opinions, special consideration was given to confidentiality, risk factors, sensitivity, and anonymity throughout the study.

3.8.3 Protection from harm

The Rules of Conduct Pertaining Specifically to Psychology, set out by the Professional Board for Psychology in the Health Professions Act of 1974, caution psychologists to take reasonable steps to avoid harming research participants and to minimise harm where it is foreseeable and avoidable.

I aimed, at all times, to preserve the human dignity of the participants. I anticipated and guarded against any potential harm, whether it be of a psychological, physical, or legal nature.

62

In adhering to the Health Professions Act of 1974, I refrained from stereotyping or discriminating against any of my participants and ensured that all participants were able to fully participate in a language- and culturally appropriate way. Since the data collection placed high demands on the sensitivity of sharing subjective experiences, I took reasonable measures to avoid exposing participants to unnecessary stress and embarrassment.

3.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter comprises a detailed account of the procedures I followed, as well as the research design, methodology, and strategies I adopted in this study. I further described my choice of paradigmatic assumptions, including the metatheoretical and methodological paradigm of the study. I justified my preferred methods of inquiry and identified ways to address the potential challenges of the various methodological choices. In addition, I discussed the specific challenges pertaining to my involvement in the research process. Lastly, the quality of the study, as well as ethical issues pertaining to the research process, were considered.

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CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 3 I focused on the research methodology and strategies I followed in this study. I presented the research paradigm and case study research design adopted during this study. Attention was given to the justification of my research design and methodological choices in relation to the research questions and purpose. I concluded the chapter by discussing the ethical considerations and quality criteria that guided my study.

Chapter 4 aims to present the results of my research. I start off by summarising the inclusion and exclusion criteria for each theme and identified subtheme. I then present the findings according to the themes and subthemes as they emerged during the thematic analysis of raw data; this is followed by an in-depth discussion of each theme in relation to existing literature. As my study aimed at understanding students' experiences of ASL, participants' voices were included in the discussion in the form of verbatim quotations from interviews and questionnaires. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings in this study.

4.2 RESULTS OF THE THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Four major themes emerged during thematic analysis namely:

- Perceptions of ASL as a vehicle for social transformation.
- ASL embedded in a scholarship of engagement.
- The role of ASL to inform future curriculum development.
- ASL shapes students' professional identity as educational psychologists.

In Table 4.1, I outline the themes as well as the subthemes identified in this study.

Table 4.1: Themes and subthemes

Theme 1: Perceptions of ASL as a vehicle for social transformation
– Subtheme 1.1: Adopting a social justice perspective on community engagement.
– Subtheme 1.2: ASL is a platform for engaging with diversity.
– Subtheme 1.3: The value of identifying and mobilising local assets and resources in a rural setting.
Theme 2: ASL embedded in a scholarship of engagement
– Subtheme 2.1: Prolonged engagement and increased collaboration is needed to maintain and strengthen a partnership.
– Subtheme 2.2: ASL facilitates the co-construction and exchange of knowledge between partners in higher education and rural schools.
– Subtheme 2.3: The partnership holds value for all stakeholders.
Theme 3: The role of ASL to inform future curriculum development
– Subtheme 3.1: Multi-layered feedback on ASL can inform curriculum adaptation and development.
– Subtheme 3.2: ASL has significance as a platform for experiential learning.
– Subtheme 3.3: Integrating ASL preparation into the curriculum.
– Subtheme 3.4: Address logistical challenges to streamline the ASL practicum.
Theme 4: ASL shapes students' professional identity as educational psychologists
– Subtheme 4.1: Reflection has value for personal and professional development.
– Subtheme 4.2: Competence in cross-cultural assessment and intervention is increased.
– Subtheme 4.3: There is engagement with the roles and responsibilities of educational psychologists in South Africa.

4.2.1 Theme 1: Perceptions of academic service learning as a vehicle for social transformation

In this theme participants' perceptions of ASL as a vehicle for social transformation are discussed. Three subthemes were identified relating to their experiences of a social justice framework for understanding socio-economic challenges, the impact of interactions between different cultures and languages in facilitating social change, and the value that the identification and mobilisation of local assets and resources hold for social change. The inclusion and exclusion indicators for each subtheme are presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for Theme 1

Theme 1: Perceptions of ASL as a vehicle for social transformation		
Subtheme	**Inclusion criteria**	**Exclusion criteria**
Subtheme 1.1: **Adopting a social justice perspective on community engagement.**	Any reference to community engagement embedded in a social justice perspective.	Reference to any other approaches to understanding community engagement.
Subtheme 1.2: **ASL is a platform for engaging with diversity.**	Any reference to the role of ASL in enabling students to engage with diversity.	Reference to ASL as a platform for engaging with any construct that is not linked to diversity.
Subtheme 1.3: **The value of identifying and mobilising local assets and resources in a rural setting.**	Any reference to the value of a strength-based approach in a rural setting.	Reference to efforts focused on the limitations, challenges and barriers in a rural setting.

4.2.1.1 Subtheme 1.1: Adopting a social justice perspective on community engagement

From the interviews and questionnaires, it became clear that the idea of social justice was perceived as a lens through which participants could make sense of the FLY partnership. Participants from various cohorts (2007, 2008, 2009, 2011, and 2013) experienced social justice as integral to their understanding of the higher education community engagement partnership.

Participants' knowledge of what the partnership entails, as well as their perception of their own role in the partnership, was firmly embedded in a social justice perspective. During a follow-up email correspondence with one of the participants from the 2009 cohort, I asked her to clarify what she meant with the promotion of social justice through the partnership. She reflected on the retrospective insights gained when reading up on the topic of social justice for research purposes years after her ASL experience: "I could see from the literature that the service learning of the Ed Psych students forms part of the broader picture of social justice" (P[4]9).

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[4] P stands for Participant

Some participants felt that involvement in the partnership fostered a deeper understanding of the concept of social justice: *"So my understanding of the FLY partnership is that it's...very much centred on the idea of social justice and going out, you know, into communities...or in this particular community where perhaps the students aren't flourishing as well as they could be and it's about giving people opportunities to really just improve on sort of where they are now and to expand possibilities, is probably the more appropriate way to say it"* (P16, I3[5], lines 9-14). Alongside increased insight into social justice, was greater awareness of and reflection on the power imbalances that had to be addressed when engaging with the community: *"I remember our discussions on being mindful that when we enter a community, we are coming from a privileged position and that there are likely to be unequal power relations that we would need to manage"* (P9, lines 28-31).

One of the participants demonstrated her understanding of the ASL partnership by highlighting its role in social transformation: *"It is aimed at implementing academic knowledge in mobilizing social change for those who are under privileged and under resourced"* (P9, lines 7-8). When asked to elaborate on her understanding of social change during member checking, the participant explained: *"In this context I refer to the skills that can be learned so that the community can improve their social circumstances themselves – thus taking the initiative and mobilising themselves instead of waiting for others to do something for them"* (P9, T[6]).

One participant considered the social justice approach as a partnership strength by linking it to her experience of seeing teachers and learners taking ownership and becoming agents of change in their community: *"So what I really liked is that when there were challenges...they themselves came up with the solutions and that's something very nice. I think we learn a lot about community engagement, but we always have this perspective that we are the ones who are coming to help them and to save them and what I liked about his project in particular, that was not the case."* (P2, I1, lines 63-67).

4.2.1.2 Subtheme 1.2: Academic service learning is a platform for engaging with diversity

Participants' retrospective experiences revealed that ASL provided a platform to engage with differences in terms of culture, language, and socio-economic background. According to the data, diversity was encountered by students from all seven cohorts and played a noteworthy

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[5] I stands for Interview

[6] T stands for Translated

67

role in their learning experience. Differences between participant and learner also shaped their interactions with one another. While most participants commented on the barriers created by these differences, learning to engage with clients from different language and cultural backgrounds seems to have benefitted participants in the long-term.

Participants from all seven cohorts (2007-2013) identified language barriers as an obstacle in their ability to connect meaningfully with learners from the rural school: "*I really wanted to use the opportunity to bring this* [sic] *learners an opportunity of growth but was not sure if my message reached them clearly!*" (P6, lines 42-43). One participant recognised that it was not only the communication with the learners that was affected: "*The language differences between many of the ASL-students and the learners and staff at the school acts as a barrier throughout the whole process. In my opinion the language barrier mostly negatively affect* [sic] *the students as it could influence the quality of the services provided by the psychology students*" (P4, lines 23-26).

Participants experienced feelings linked to anxiety concerning the impact that language barriers would have on the quality of services offered to the learners: "*I was scared that the language issue limits the explanation given to the Grade 9 - learners as well as the richness of the information we had to make our own*" (P21, lines 32-34). One participant articulated her unique experience of feeling left out: "*I am black but a foreigner so I don't speak any of the South African languages. I felt bad when the learners spoke something as we were interacting and I was not able to understand what they were saying*" (P17, lines 43-45).

Culture also seemed to create barriers that made it difficult for participants to establish rapport with their clients: "*The cultural divide and especially the rural student's reaction to it have had a major impact on my interaction with them*" (P14, lines 29-31). She later explained further: "*Remember firstly – as human beings we are not always receptive to learning from people that we 'don't understand' or that we believe 'don't understand me or my world.'*" (P14, lines 32-34).

Despite recognising understandable difficulties that arose from multi-cultural interactions, various participants focused their attention on the learning that took place during the process. Some participants were able to see the value of dealing with diversity as a student in educational psychology: "*You need to understand their [the learners'] cultural backgrounds and their language backgrounds in order to assess them. So I thought you know, in a South African context, you know, where it's so multi-racial, it's important to have that exposure to different racial groups*" (P2, I1, lines 52-55).

Looking back on their experiences as students some years later, participants were able to analyse their understanding of the situation retrospectively. They were able to recognise the long-term benefits of their interactions during the ASL practicum: "*I have definitely learned how to manage cultural differences better (I have to say retrospective learning) as in the moment I struggled but on the long term when I thought back I realized how and what to do in situations like this*" (P14, lines 62-64).

One of the participants from the 2007 cohort, showed insight into the deeper issues that were addressed by using ASL to create a platform for cultural engagement: "*The vigorous contribution that it [the partnership] makes in terms of community involvement and transformation and initiative to promote relationships, to almost reunite the strangeness of people who live in a different cultural and social environment and to bridge that strangeness and to show that we are on the same side in a country that has vast variety and diversity*" (P1, I4, T, lines 27-31).

He then contextualised this retrospective understanding of the role of ASL within the socio-historical background of the country: "*For me there is then also an almost conciliatory component which I think plays a very important role, precisely due to the South African history and political system that we've had with Apartheid and the fact that we stood on two different sides of a bridge and I think this is a good outreach opportunity. Even though it's possibly not aimed at it specifically, it does well in promoting provision and good dispositions*" (P1, I4, T, lines 34-40).

4.2.1.3 Subtheme 1.3: The value of identifying and mobilising local assets and resources in a rural setting

A strength-based stance to community development was highlighted as a key aspect of the ASL process by most of the cohorts. Participants' understanding of an asset-based approach reflected the identification and mobilisation of assets and resources in the rural school. Perspectives on an asset-based approach were expressed by students from all cohorts except 2007 and 2012 and emerged in questions regarding participants' understanding of the partnership, identification of partnership strengths, suggestions for future planning of FLY, as well as reflections on personal experiences working with the learners during their practicum.

Participants made reference to words and phrases linked to positive psychology when describing the purpose of the partnership, suggesting that their understanding of the partnership was embedded in an asset-based framework: "*positive psychology perspective*" (P5, line 26), "*facilitating a flourishing life*" (P22, line 7), "*building resilience in vulnerable*

69

communities" (P14, lines 8-9)*,* and *"mobilization of the strengths and assets"* (P4, line 8)*.* The identification and mobilisation of existing strengths were implemented *"in all sub-systems e.g. micro, meso and macro, taking barriers into mind"* (P5, lines 22-23).

Upon reflection, participants took cognisance of the strengths that the learners displayed in terms of hope, resilience, and growth despite the challenging realities distinctive of a resource-constrained environment: *"They [the learners] gave me new insight into their approaches to life, and their hopes and dreams regarding their futures. I also had a chance to see and hear what they had to deal with every day and how resilient they were"* (P15, lines 18-20). The identification of local assets and resources in the environment and within individuals became apparent: *"I enjoyed working in the setting despite the fact that the community lacked in some areas - they had wealth in others like the natural surroundings, the enthusiasm in many of the learners and staff"* (P10, lines 29-31).

Sustainable social change, as opposed to charity, is tied to a deep understanding of the asset-based approach to community development: *"When we find ourselves involved in community work, we so often do charity and we don't 'do change'. By using already existing assets and by teaching this community how to mobilize, strengthen and enhance what they already have there is no pressure on the community to use/not use resources as it will not 'disappear'"* (P14 lines 13-16). A greater sense of awareness of existing assets and resources benefitted some participants in the long-term: *"I also learned that we have assets all around us, even if it is just your own arm or leg – but there is never 'nothing' around you to mobilize. I have helped many students at (university) after my training and in my job at Student Support in this way"* (P14, lines 64-67).

One participant in particular encapsulated her consideration of the asset-based approach as an important building block in affecting change in individuals and subsequently also communities:

> *In the long term I have benefitted by taking with me this realisation that even if things appear bleak at first each situation has the potential to blossom and reveal assets... It also helped me make a paradigm shift – towards assets and resilience, but also by creating a realisation that growth and future directedness can take many forms – they do not need to fit into neat little boxes that society has created, but each individual can work towards their own, attainable and realistic goal – even if it is just, as was the case with a few of my students, to reach matric without falling pregnant so that they would be able to continue their educational journey unhindered and be able to flourish*
> (P5, lines 36-47).

4.2.1.4 Discussion of findings for Theme 1

Literature on higher education acknowledges the importance of community engagement as a critical role player in the transformative process of South African society (Thomson et al., 2011). Rosner-Salazar (2003,) argues that ASL and research in diverse settings can increase awareness of social justice and encourage active pursuit of social transformation.

Participants' view of ASL as an entry-point for understanding social justice in action and enhancing social responsibility is echoed in studies exploring students' experiences of ASL both locally (e.g. Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009; Netshandama, Maluleke, & Kutame, 2011; Roos et al., 2005) and internationally (e.g. Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007; Moely et al., 2002). In this study, participants across cohorts recognised the role of ASL to enhance mindfulness of the impact that unequal power relations are having in a deeply divided society. These findings are consistent with those of similar studies, where ASL students reported increased engagement in discourse about social inequalities (Baldwin et al., 2007) as well as increased awareness of societal factors that affect individual outcomes (i.e. social justice) (Moely et al., 2002). Furthermore, participants in this study benefitted from developing heightened civic responsibility and showed increased commitment to adopting a social justice agenda in their future work as psychologists. This is similar to themes that emerged in previous studies, where students experienced a greater sense of social responsibility (e.g. Astin et al., 2000; Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009).

According to literature, ASL provides a pathway for student learning which promotes engagement with a variety of cultures in a country marked by racial and economic differences (HEQC, 2004; Rosner-Salazar, 2003). The "conciliatory component" (P1, I4, T, line 35) of ASL became evident in this study as participants reflected on the opportunity for ASL to integrate cultures who were previously separated. Participants' awareness of and appreciation for engaging with diversity (including different cultural, language, and socio-economic backgrounds) increased as part of the learning experience offered by ASL. These findings replicate a number of recent studies. Similar themes related to diversity and cultural competence have emerged in literature on ASL student experiences, including learning about other cultures and adopting a more positive attitude towards working in marginalised settings (Baldwin et al., 2007), becoming more tolerant and appreciative of diversity (Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009), enhancing cultural awareness and dismantling cultural stereotypes (Mouton & Wildschut, 2005), and increasing confidence in communicating with people of different backgrounds or cultures (Ellerton et al., 2015).

Although most participants were able to perceive the long-term benefits of engaging with learners from different backgrounds during their ASL practicum, some students emphasised

the challenges of working with diversity. These findings were not unique to this study. In a study by Roos et al. (2005), students from various disciplines in the Faculty of Humanities at a South African university tended to recognise only the problems related to differences encountered during the ASL. This is to be expected considering the variety of demands that the unique South African landscape places on students providing services to communities characterised by multiple cultures and languages (Mouton & Wildschut, 2005). Participants in the current study felt that language differences in particular restrained their efforts to establish rapport and construct meaning with their clients. According to Roos et al. (2005, p.712), "the fact that they perceived diversity could be a starting point for facilitating a celebration of diversity."

Participants' positive experience of a strength-based approach to ASL and community development highlighted the importance of a strong focus on assets and resources when partnering with a rural school. This is reiterated in a previous study which found that students experienced gains related to increased understanding of not just the widespread needs and issues that exist in rural communities, but also the local assets and resources Ebersöhn et al., 2010). Based on these findings, which explored educational psychology students' experiences of ASL, Ebersöhn et al. (2010) suggest that asset-based and positive psychology frameworks need to be included in modules with a focus on community engagement (Ebersöhn et al., 2010).

In another study, students experienced pre-ASL activities within an asset-based framework in a community setting as favourable and related it to a better understanding of the concept of community as well as the reciprocal relationship between individuals and communities (Garoutte & McCarthy-Gilmore, 2014). These students also reported feeling more involved and engaged in the community at the end of their experience (Garoutte & McCarthy-Gilmore, 2014); however, this theme did not arise in the current study. An overview of literature on ASL from the students' viewpoint revealed that research on students' perceptions of an asset-based approach to community interventions with a rural school is limited, which might be attributed to the distinctive frameworks from which community engagement is approached in different universities (Ostrander, 2004) and countries (Hatcher & Erasmus, 2008).

4.2.2 Theme 2: Academic service learning embedded in a scholarship of engagement

Participants' view of ASL, within the framework of engaged scholarship, as a building block in establishing collaboration and knowledge exchange in higher education community engagement partnerships. Participants from all seven cohorts actively participated in the

discourse on how to advance interaction between higher education and rural schools through engaged learning that is meaningful to all stakeholders. The inclusion and exclusion indicators for each subtheme are presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for Theme 2

Theme 2: ASL embedded in a scholarship of engagement		
Subtheme	**Inclusion criteria**	**Exclusion criteria**
Subtheme 2.1: Prolonged engagement and increased collaboration is needed to maintain and strengthen a partnership.	Any reference to on-going engagement and increased opportunities for collaboration between all partners involved.	Any reference to short-term or once-off engagement and lack of collaboration between partners.
Subtheme 2.2: ASL facilitates the co-construction and exchange of knowledge between partners in higher education and rural schools.	Any reference to co-constructed and shared knowledge between the rural school and the university partners.	Reference to knowledge being co-constructed and shared between entities other than the rural school and university partners.
Subtheme 2.3: The partnership holds value for all stakeholders.	Any reference to the benefit of the partnership for all role players.	Reference to the partnership being beneficial to only one role player or certain role players.

4.2.2.1 Subtheme 2.1: Prolonged engagement and increased collaboration is needed to maintain and strengthen a partnership

This subtheme relates to the views expressed by participants from all seven cohorts on the essential role of sustained engagement and improved collaboration and networking in promoting the partnership between a rural school and the higher education institution.

The longevity of the partnership and the continued collaborative efforts among role players over the past several years emerged as a partnership strength in terms of community development: "*Longer-running projects I think do tend to have a bigger footprint on the community than a quick in-and-out project for one or two years, so hopefully in the sense that it's a longer-running project, it's able to...how shall we phrase it...encourage some more sustainable training within the community or encourage a bit more community development*" (P18, lines 42-46).

Although the project was acknowledged as long-term in the sense that it had been running for several years, some participants felt that the limited annual contact time between students

73

and learners affected the impact of the project negatively: "*The limited time possibly influences the effect on the community in that the follow through of the skills that was taught cannot be entirely facilitated*" (P21, lines 15-17). Insufficient engagement with teachers was identified as an additional barrier to meeting the on-going needs of the learners: "*They [teachers] are a crucial cog in the wheel for these learners and they could provide support to these learners in our absence. Perhaps they do, but if we had worked more closely with the teachers, this may have facilitated better follow up for the learners on subject choices and career options going forward*" (P19, lines 14-17).

During member checking, two participants elaborated on their understanding of prolonged engagement. Extended engagement time during ASL was identified as a vehicle for strengthening the impact of the partnership on the community: "*Prolonged engagement can definitely supplement current development opportunities and accelerate growth of all role players*" (P21). A prolonged practicum would not only benefit the community, but also the ASL students: "*...for students to be involved for a prolonged period would possibly mean their experience is expanded and therefore gets them ready for the work to be done in rural communities.*" (P20).

To rise to the challenge of limited engagement time with the community, one participant suggested that students in education, educational psychology, or counselling could potentially be placed at the school for a time period to do their internship/practical while offering services to the school and conducting research: *"I think a more sustainable, almost ethnographic study, where you are in the culture and milieu for a longer time period, will possibly make a better contribution in terms of the project or research"* (P1, I4, T, lines 85-88). Follow-up studies were recommended as a way of ensuring that learners' needs continue to be met, especially in terms of their careers and further education: "*Yes, we did provide them with resources but I feel the follow-up is needed as many do not have easy access to resources and might find barriers along the way*" (P11, lines 20-23).

The current "core" role players at the university that have been dedicated to the project since the start, have played a valuable role in ensuring continued community involvement: "*Something I learned on the long-term is that if you really want something to be a success, you need to have a few committed people working at it. So I like that idea of sustainability*" (P1, I4, T, lines 246-248). On the other hand, lack of permanence with regards to some of the other role players in the partnership was highlighted as a potential area for growth: "*A challenge could be in maintaining the continuity of the programme since many individual role players come and go (both students, learners and staff)*" (P10, lines 14-16). "*Funding to continue partnership*" (P9, line 29) was also raised as a potential concern.

74

For the partnership to be deeply meaningful, it is recommended that connections are expanded to include professionals from related disciplines that can collaborate in the FLY project in order to facilitate learning support: *"...if there were other professionals that they can link to, that can come in, that can maybe help, I think that those involved in the FLY project are probably in the best position to link them with other people who can assist them"* (P16, I3, lines 70-72). He later reflected on his experience of the learners' needs during ASL: "*I think that with the kids that we certainly worked with in 2011, I think that there were [sic] certainly a lot of need just on a scholastic basis, you know. There's no such thing as sort of remedial assistance in that setting"* (P16, I3, lines 75-78).

During member checking, one participant suggested that collaboration with the parents can also be integrated into the ASL programme from a systemic perspective: "*In addition, the partnership can be expanded by incorporating additional systems within the community, e.g. activities encouraging parent involvement"* (P21).

In addition, networking with other departments at UP can support the development of both the school and community systems: "*I think the spirit of development and collaboration can be continually expanded by linking with other departments at the university – as has been the case in the past. In this way this project could also work on community development"* (P7, lines 16-18). Improved infrastructure through the involvement of stakeholders not currently part of the FLY project, was identified as another pathway to ensure sustainable development into the future: *"Maybe linking them (the school) to professionals or companies maybe that can even help with just the on-site infrastructure. I mean when I was there, there were literally roofs that were caving in, you know. Surely there are those people that are willing to invest in something that they see has a lot of value"* (P16, I3, lines 78-81).

4.2.2.2 Subtheme 2.2: Academic service learning facilitates the co-construction and exchange of knowledge between partners in higher education and rural schools

The active process of knowledge building between partners was highlighted as a recurring subtheme by participants across all cohorts. Knowledge was co-constructed by students and learners (i.e. reciprocal learning), shared amongst the Master's students, and also generated in an academic sense for research purposes.

Participants felt that they benefitted from the "*opportunity to learn from fellow students*" (P9, line 47). Knowledge exchange between students enriched the learning experience and helped to broaden students' knowledge during their practicum: "*You get to share your fears and your successes. You get to bounce ideas of [sic] one another and truly sense how each person*

perceives educational psychology as our field of excellence and how it can contribute value to a positive South Africa. The amount of knowledge that participating students acquires during that time is of inestimable value" (P21, lines 22-26).

Indigenous knowledge systems were integrated into students' existing knowledge framework through their interactions with the learners from the rural school: "*I learned a lot about systems and how things work in a 'village' community"* (P3, lines 48-49). One participant described her experience of reciprocal learning as follows:

> "*The school visits we did were, in my opinion, not just about us imparting advice and 'expecting' the learners to take it, but also about us learning about how we can provide services to the majority of South Africans. Learning to slow down and pay attention and show respect for our clients. We learnt about the challenges of working in resource-scarce environments...language barriers, resource scarcity, socio-economic challenges and so on"* (P19, lines 7-12).

In terms of future engagements with the community, one participant expressed his views on potential knowledge sharing using an intergenerational narrative approach: *"So I think with regards to the future, one can perhaps expose the students to some of the traditional stories that even some of the older people in the environment come to tell and share with the students. I have a feeling we can learn much more from the community than we are learning at this stage"* (P1, I4, lines 143-147).

Participants also reflected on the theoretical knowledge that they brought with them to the practicum: *"I gather from my experience and from other conversations that it [the partnership] is aimed at implementing academic knowledge in mobilizing social change for those who are under privileged and under resourced"* (P14, lines 6-8). Most of the knowledge shared with learners centred on career construction: *"...it [the partnership] was very much focussed on working with kids and exploring career options, possibilities, what they know, and looking to expand upon their knowledge base"* (P16, I3, lines 20-22).

Participants considered the FLY partnership to provide an opportunity for knowledge generation that can contribute to further research: *"The entire partnership gives way for research to be done on community engagement as a whole and for other professionals to then share in this newly gained knowledge"* (P21, lines 11-13). These knowledge gains subsequently produce research that can translate into future practices: "*During this process the ASL-students and lecturers also generate knowledge by conducting research within these settings and/or by using these experiences and knowledge gained in their future professional practice"* (P4, lines 9-11).

4.2.2.3 Subtheme 2.3: The partnership holds value for all stakeholders

This subtheme is focussed on participants' perception of the partnership as meaningful to all stakeholders, with the emphasis on university and school partners receiving equal attention. This subtheme was evident across all cohorts except the 2008 cohort, where no mention was made of the mutual benefit that the partnership had for all role players.

The long-term engagement with the rural school contributed to the benefit of all role players: "*In my opinion, sustained, positive interaction intent on service delivery and upliftment creates a bond/partnership that is mutually beneficial*" (P15, lines 9-10). The two-fold focus of the partnership can be found in balancing benefits to students and learners: "*On the one hand, I think it [FLY partnership] has an academic accountability strength in terms of the contribution it makes, not just for us as students in terms of exposure, but also for them [learners] in terms of considering other types of careers and lifestyles*" (P1, I4, T, lines 31-34).

Participants felt they benefitted from the learning experience of working alongside a rural community: "*... the University students gain exposure to working in outreach communities (rural schools) providing services*" (P13, lines 3-4). It also created an opportunity for participants to practically apply their knowledge and skills in a real-life setting: "*FLY is beneficial in that it provides student educational psychologists with the opportunity to practice their skills in a context very different from most of the opportunities offered by the MEd. Ed. Psych. Programme*" (P12, lines 12-14).

In turn, participants mentioned some of the benefits for the learners such as guidance in terms of future life choices: "*The domain of career counselling and subject choice benefits/affects the career paths and learning of scholars...who participate in this program*" (P12, lines 6-7). On a more practical level, "*learners are afforded the opportunity to gain access to information and resources which would not normally be accessible to them*" (P13, lines 7-8). The students' role in the partnership is understood as "*facilitating a flourishing life*" (P22, line 7) or to "*assist learners with self-exploration and giving a future perspective*" (P5, line 30).

Consequently, the partnership also adds value to the larger school system: "*...the schools gain in return of exposing their learners to information about careers and therapeutic services*" (P13, lines 4-5). One participant elaborated on the ways in which she believed the higher education community engagement contributed to the community on a macro level:

> *I think it succeeds in its venture to invest in the lives of people, it gives opportunity to not only the Grade 9 – learners to benefit from the partnership, but also for the masters students to gain experience regarding community*

4.2.2.4 Discussion of findings for Theme 2

The theme on a scholarship of engagement adds value to our understanding of how "sustainable empowering learning environments" can be created as a function of higher education community engagement (Mahlomaholo, Francis, & Nkoane, 2010, p.285). Within the review of literature on engaged scholarship, the concept of the higher education institution as an ivory tower is continually being criticised for its lack of responsiveness to and collaboration with communities (Mahlomaholo, 2010). Participants articulated the importance of being engaged scholars by continually engaging with the partner-school and establishing a truly collaborative culture between all partners.

Based on their retrospective experiences of the ASL practicum, some participants expressed concern about the viability of the FLY project in terms of its discernible impact on the rural school and its learners. This finding supports existing knowledge, that ASL students often have ambiguous feelings about the sustainability of their impact on communities due to the limited engagement time (e.g. Gerstenblatt & Gilbert, 2004; Mouton & Wildschut, 2005). Limited time during ASL practicums has previously been identified by students as preventing authentic engagement with the community on issues of diversity for the sake of "maintaining politeness" (Carolissen, 2012, p.65).

Prolonged engagement and increased collaboration were identified by participants as key factors in maintaining and strengthening a sustainable, meaningful partnership between the university and the partner-school. Literature on student partners' suggestions of how more sustainable, prolonged ASL engagement might be achieved, was lacking and thus identified as a gap in existing knowledge.

In this study, participants emphasised the platform offered by ASL for the co-construction of knowledge by all partners, including researchers, students, learners at the partner-school, the school and community. There are a growing number of studies in literature on scholarship of engagement that acknowledge the significance of joint knowledge construction between partners in higher education community engagement partnerships, specifically drawing on the authentic knowledge systems of students and community members (Fourie, 2003; Mthembu & Mtshali, 2013; Petersen et al., 2008). A summary of findings of ASL literature on higher

education between 1993 and 2000 revealed that ASL positively contributed to the deconstruction of stereotypes and facilitation of cultural and racial understanding (Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001). However, studies exploring students' personal experiences of knowledge exchange between beneficiaries seems to be lacking.

Participants in this study gained from broadening their knowledge and understanding of the realities of others, as is also reflected in a study of students' experiences of the value of a CSI (Community, Self and Identity) module by Carolissen (2012, p.67): "A student commented that she became acutely aware of her own positionality in the face of others' differences and that exposure to others brought some understanding of the 'other'." Furthermore, a study by Naidoo and Devnarain (2009) found that the student partner benefitted from gaining insight into the indigenous knowledge and experience of the cultural and community systems, while the community members benefitted from the students' academic expertise and guidance in facilitating the identification of problems and addressing problems that emerged (Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009).

Participants' perception of students, learners, and the bigger community all being beneficiaries of the partnership, highlights the role of ASL in creating engaged learning spaces. This view is supported in a previous study where the overwhelming response of ASL students was that they thought their community involvement benefitted not only themselves, but also added value to the community, albeit in different ways (Mouton & Wildschut, 2005).

4.2.3 Theme 3: The role of academic service learning to inform future curriculum development

This theme relates to the role of ASL in shaping the curriculum for the Master's degree in Educational Psychology from the participants' perspective. Participants highlighted the importance of feedback from all stakeholders regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the partnership, which can then be taken into account in designing and adapting the curriculum in a way that will benefit all partners. Participants also experienced ASL as positive due to its experiential nature that holds value for the Master's student. Areas of future development were also identified by participants that include improved preparation for the practicum and addressing logistical challenges that have emerged over the years. The inclusion and exclusion indicators for subtheme are presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for Theme 3

Theme 3: The role of ASL to inform curriculum development		
Subtheme	**Inclusion criteria**	**Exclusion criteria**
Subtheme 3.1: Multi-layered feedback on ASL can inform curriculum development and adaptation.	Any reference to the importance of feedback from multiple partners in the partnership.	Reference to the importance of feedback from a single partner in the partnership.
Subtheme 3.2: ASL has significance as a platform for experiential learning.	Any reference to the role of ASL in promoting experiential learning as part of the curriculum.	Reference to the role of ASL in promoting any other forms of learning as part of the curriculum.
Subtheme 3.3: Integrating ASL preparation into the curriculum.	Any reference to the need for more structured planning and preparation of ASL practicum to be included into the curriculum.	Reference to the insignificance of structured planning and preparation of ASL in the curriculum.
Subtheme 3.4: Address logistical challenges to streamline the ASL practicum.	Any reference to logistical challenges encountered by participants and ways of addressing these challenges in the future.	Reference to any other challenges encountered by the participants during the ASL practicum.

4.2.3.1 Subtheme 3.1: Multi-layered feedback on academic service learning can inform curriculum development and adaptation

This subtheme centres on the participants' views on the importance of taking into account the feedback gathered from all role players regarding ASL when restructuring and adapting the FLY project and by implication also the academic curriculum. Participants recommended that needs assessments and research be utilised to guide the development and refinement of the curriculum. Participants from the 2007, 2009, 2011, and 2013 cohorts made mention of the need for input from multiple partners regarding ASL.

Participants emphasised the importance of all partners' voices in informing ASL: "*Taking suggestions of partners into account when planning future projects of FLY*" (P9, lines 36-37). Many participants recommended that needs assessments be conducted that are focused on the needs of the learners: "*Continued re-assessment of what has been done and reflection and feedback from the school and the students there (the children on what they would want/need)*" (P7, line 20). An initial visit could assist students in knowing what kind of services the learners would benefit from: "*I felt that it could have been good to go there first and get to*

80

know what the learners and the school say that they need before we went there to actually started working with the learners" (P17, lines 7-9).

Research findings should be communicated back to participants to ensure that all parties are informed about the development of the programme: "*Make [research] results available to all role-players especially the community involved in the research process in order to inform on and improve the programme"* (P10, lines 17-18). Participatory Action Research (PAR) can be valuable in obtaining feedback which can guide the adaptation of the curriculum to the changing needs of the partners: "*In return, students and lecturers have an opportunity to conduct research (PAR) which helps them to refine and improve their strategies and better understand the communities"* (P15, lines 2-4).

4.2.3.2 Subtheme 3.2: Academic service learning has significance as a platform for experiential learning

In this subtheme, participants reflected on the practical experience that ASL provided them beyond the training facility at the university. Participants elaborated on the opportunity they were given to apply theoretical knowledge in a real school environment. This was identified as a positive experience across all seven cohorts.

The integration of theory and practice emerged as a recurring theme that demonstrated the experiential learning that took place during participants' ASL practicum: "*The partnership provides the ASL-students with the opportunity to practically apply their knowledge and skills by assessing learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and by developing and applying intervention strategies and therapy techniques. It helps with the conversion of learned knowledge to practical skills and application"* (P4, lines 12-15).

The shift away from the typical academic environment allowed participants to learn in a real life setting: "*You're out there with your knowledge, you've got to be...actively engaged with the environment and I think it's an amazing thing to experience in your time separate from just the textbooks. So I think that was something that I felt was a big advantage, which is to see theory meeting practice...It's just all this concept in motion, so I quite liked that"* (P16, I3, lines 34-39). By experimenting and exploring novel approaches in a "*safe environment"* (P12, line 52), participants were able to gain independence by working with clients in unfamiliar terrain: "*It [the FLY project] was actually empowering, because you're left to make you own decisions and that I think is a good learning curve for any student"* (P2, lines 29-30).

Participants expressed a definite need for a practical component as part of the MEd Educational Psychology curriculum: "*I think the strength of the FLY project is that it offers*

81

something very different from you know your typical academic sort of programs. I think that with the majority of a person's studies, everything tends to be very theoretically oriented" (P16, I3, lines 27-29).

The learning that took place involved novel problem solving and required participants to make constant adaptations according to their changing environment: "*It was a fantastic learning experience. We had to problem-solve on our feet, and just work out what we could do when our beautifully laid plans went awry (which they did – a bit!)"* (P19, lines 31-33). One participant described the ASL practicum as "*very different to just anything else that I've experienced in my studies up unto that point"* (P16, I3, lines 119-120).

4.2.3.3 Subtheme 3.3: Integrating academic service learning preparation into the curriculum

Some participants did not feel sufficiently prepared as they endeavored to engage with the learners from the rural school. Suggestions were made on how to integrate well-structured planning and preparation for ASL into the curriculum. Participants from cohorts 2007, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2013 commented on the planning and preparation of the ASL practicum.

One participant recalled the uncertainties she experienced as she entered into the practicum:

> *I mean, one of the difficulties we had was the language barrier, just being prepared for that. I think also a big thing is that we didn't know what to always expect when we were out there. And I know what they've done now is that they have students from previous years who come and talk to you and tell you how to prepare. I don't know if that's happening. And also, there's more instructions within the study guide on how to prepare* (P2, I1, lines 91-95).

She then explained: "*I'm a type A, so I like to be organised and I like to know what to expect...Especially with the master's program you're doing so much, so you just want to know what is required of you so that you can give the best job to the learners at the school"* (P2, lines 106-108).

Participants mentioned a need for increased preparation in various areas of the ASL practicum, including what to expect in terms of language barriers, what stationary to take and which assessments to prepare. "*Cultural sensitivity training"* (P14, lines 51-52) as well as the use of interpreters were recommended as possible ways of preparing students for working in a diverse setting.

Some participants would have preferred to learn more about the notion of social transformation prior to the practicum: *"Working towards social change should be explicitly included in the training modules of education psychology students as it helps them in understanding and dealing with issues that they might find on the ground"* (P17, lines 20-22). However, another participant from the same cohort felt prepared to deal with issues arising from social justice during the visit to the rural school: *"We were given quite a lot of preparation in terms of what are some of the things that we need to think about in terms of themes that would guide the process, one of which was social justice"* (P18, lines 101-103).

The importance of communicating the larger aim of the FLY project to both students and learners was highlighted as an area that needs attention: *"We were never introduced to the project (properly explained what it was about etc.), we were not introduced to the headmaster or the staff. We were simply told what we were supposed to do there and the expected outcomes"* (P13, lines 15-17).

Improvements can also be implemented in preparing the school partner in terms of expectations about the visit: *"It also didn't seem like the learners at the school were really part of the 'partnership', or had actually been informed about why we were there and what the FLY-partnership was actually about. Some of them resented our intrusion, and participated grudgingly"* (P13, lines 17-20). Another participant felt that the partnership can do more to ensure that all partners are informed about the roles of the different partners: *"[School] partners expect too much – roles not properly communicated or understood by all"* (P9, lines 27-28).

Another way to prepare students more thoroughly, is through the sharing of personal experiences of former ASL students so that knowledge can be passed on from one student cohort to the next: *"In their involvement maybe previous students can be invited to share their experiences or professionals who are involved in such work just to broaden student-psychologists' knowledge in rendering services in areas of scarce resources"* (P20, lines 16-18). Information sessions with students can provide an opportunity to discuss expectations: *"Information session with the students of what to expect regarding the difference in of culture, language and flexibility in assessment tools etc. because I think for me with a 'planning' personality I would have been more emotionally prepared for the first visit."* (P6, lines 20-24).

In addition, the purpose of the visit should be clarified as part of the MEd Educational Psychology course and the focus should be on the practical experience: *"Outcomes should be outlined in the beginning and regardless of the fact the students have to be awarded marks for it; the driving factor should not be that but the importance of giving back to the community and making a change in the lives of others"* (P17, lines 23-25).

4.2.3.4 Subtheme 3.4: Address logistical challenges to streamline the academic service learning practicum

This subtheme encapsulates the logistical challenges that participants encountered over the past seven years. Awareness of these difficulties perceived by ASL students paves the way for adapting the curriculum to ensure that these challenges are addressed in the future. Views of participants across all seven cohorts were included in this subtheme and there seemed to be no significant differences between the challenges mentioned by the various cohorts.

The travelling distance to the ASL site posed a challenge to engage with the rural school, as it was difficult *"to establish frequent visits and adequate communication between partners"* (P9, lines 25-26). The distance to the school also meant that all resources needed to be transported to the rural area (P9, lines 52-53): *"Having to transport all materials and stationary was a challenge as space was limited."* Furthermore, the distance to the school meant time away from family members: *"(I think to be far away from your family was definitely a bit difficult at times, but we weren't away for long, so it wasn't that intense)"* (P1, I4, T, lines 296-298), as well as time away from work and other responsibilities: *"(I think that would be the only negative: that it's a bit far and if you're working it's just hard to balance it with your studies and work and life)"* (P1, I4, T, lines 81-83).

Another barrier was the limited space and work areas: *"Space and work areas were a problem, but as a group my students and I adjusted. It truly brought the concept of alternative, asset based assessment home for me"* (P7, lines 34-35). Even though there was funding available for the FLY project, the visit to the rural school still had some financial implications for the participants: *"At the time, I was a student, I was really broke, ok? And for me, buying all the things I needed to go there with was a bit expensive. I won't lie. It was really hard for me and I mean I had to buy my own stationary. I don't know if you experienced that? I had to buy food and then we also had to buy presents"* (P2, lines 131-134).

Another challenge related to the group composition of the learners that the participants worked with. One participant (P4, line 46) found the *"large groups"* challenging, while another participant commented on the boy/girl ratio in his group which affected the dynamics of interaction:

> *I think what I found a bit of an interesting challenge, which was maybe a bit unique to maybe what other people had was that the group of learners I worked with was predominantly boys, so I think it was probably a group of 12 guys, of people in my group, 11 boys and one girl and when you've got sort of these lively older boys and one girl, it's difficult to kind of, you know, figure out how do*

84

I, you know, how do I divide my attention here? Or how do I create activities where no one feels sort of excluded (P16, lines 191-196).

The group format also limited individual contact with learners for career construction purposes: "*I think when careers are in particular such a personal thing, it's difficult to sit with a group, you know, across maybe what is it...collectively four maybe four or five days and to sort of explore all those possibilities with them*" (P16, lines 41-44).

Poor attendance of learners was also emphasised as a limitation to engagement with learners: *"Some of the children were not present the first day, which made it difficult to get that same amount of personal information from them in comparison to the rest of the group, as they missed half of the assessment. During the feedback visit some of the children could also only attend parts of the session which was not ideal"* (P21, lines 35-39).

4.2.3.5 Discussion of findings for Theme 3

Bender (2008) advocates for South African academics to actively pursue community engagement from a curriculum point of view due to the rich benefits it can hold for both the university and communities by translating the ideas of university institutions into practice. "Intentional course design" that integrate reciprocity and reflection has the potential to increase the benefits experienced by students and community partners (Gerstenblatt & Gilbert, 2014, p.1047).

Participants in the current study felt strongly about the meaningfulness of exploring and investigating knowledge and experiences of all role partners in the partnership to inform collaborative curriculum design that is responsive to their needs of all beneficiaries. This experience related by participants could not be substantiated from literature as it does not seem to have been identified as a theme in previous studies on students' experiences of ASL. However, scholarly studies on ASL do confirm the necessity of continually identifying and assessing the needs and expectations of all the partners in the partnership when developing an ASL course (Mouton & Wildschut, 2005).

Participants commented on the lasting impression that the experiential learning component of ASL made on them; reflecting on how the practicum provided a dynamic opportunity for connecting practical experience and theoretical knowledge in a meaningful way. This is consistent with previous research on students' experiences of ASL which showed that the experiential learning is valued by students and that theory-practice integration through real-world exposure is one of the most common outcomes of ASL (e.g. Carolissen, 2012; Ebersöhn et al., 2010; Ellerton et al., 2015; Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009; Netshandama et al., 2011; Roos

85

et al., 2005; Simons et al., 2012). More specifically, a study on psychology students who participated in a practicum/internship encapsulated the benefits experienced by participants as deepening their understanding of psychological content and integrating their practicum with theoretical knowledge and principles pertaining to psychology (Simons et al., 2012).

In this study, participants suggested that appropriate preparation of student and rural school partners for ASL forms an integral part of the curriculum. Student readiness and preparation as determining factors in the success or failure of course delivery is reiterated in literature (Mouton & Wildschut, 2005). Additionally, participants' concerns about creating false expectations in the community-partner is also consistent with literature that emphasise equal attention warranted for the preparation and briefing of the community prior to the ASL project (Mouton & Wildschut, 2005).

Previous studies coincide with participants' experiences in this study, showing that students often feel their training failed to adequately prepare them for the challenges inherent in working in school and community settings (Juhn et al., 1999) and engaging with diversity (Moely et al., 2002; Mouton & Wildschut, 2005; Pillay, 2003). Some of the areas that participants in this study identified as critical when briefing students for the ASL practicum were role clarification, expectation management, purpose and background of the practicum site, multi-cultural sensitivity, social justice issues, language barriers, and dynamic assessment tools. Other areas of training that did not emerge as themes in this study, but were identified in a previous study by Pillay (2003) in the South African context, included a stronger focus on training students in working with groups rather than individuals and training in an ecosystemic perspective to community engagement.

Looking back on their experiences during the ASL practicum, participants recalled some of the logistical challenges they encountered, such as extended travelling distance to the remote school, financial implications for students, limited work space at the practicum site, and learner absenteeism. From my review of literature, it became clear that these practical matters are not unique to the partnership explored in this study. Simons et al. (2012) found that faculty advisors and students' recommendations for improvement of a practicum centred primarily on the logistical issues of the program. The demands placed on students' time during ASL practicums is corroborated in literature (e.g. Kretchmar, 2001; Mouton & Wildschut, 2005; Simons et al., 2012), along with challenges regarding long travelling distances to sites and/or transportation issues (e.g. Burr, 1997; Kretchmar, 2001; Mouton & Wildschut, 2005) and funding (e.g. Netshandama et al., 2011; Simons et al., 2012).

Some of the logistical challenges that were identified as silences in the data of the current study compared to other research studies included scheduling with the agency (Kretchmar,

86

2001), placement issues (Mouton & Wildschut, 2005; Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009), paperwork (Simons et al., 2012), lack of mentors (Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009), limited support from the university (Netshandama et al. 2011), and inadequate security (Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009).

4.2.4 Theme 4: Academic service learning shapes students' professional identity as educational psychologists

Theme 4 encompasses participants' perception of ASL in a rural school environment as influential in the formation of a professional identity as educational psychologist. Participants identified various ways in which the ASL practicum contributed to their development, including continuous reflections on one's own personal and professional capacity and growth, increased competence in providing psycho-educational services cross-culturally, and gaining new insights into the roles and responsibilities of educational psychologists in the South African context. The inclusion and exclusion indicators for each subtheme are presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for Theme 4

Theme 4: ASL shapes students' professional identity as educational psychologists		
Subtheme	**Inclusion criteria**	**Exclusion criteria**
Subtheme 4.1: Reflection has value for personal and professional development.	Any reference to the positive impact of reflection on professional and personal development.	Reference to the negative impact of reflection on personal or professional development.
Subtheme 4.2: Competence in cross-cultural assessment and intervention is increased.	Any reference to participants' enhanced ability to conduct assessments and interventions with diverse clients.	Reference to participants' ability to conduct assessments and intervention with only one cultural group.
Subtheme 4.3: There is engagement with the roles and responsibilities of educational psychologists in South Africa.	Any reference to increased awareness of and insight into the roles and responsibilities of educational psychologists in the South African context.	Reference to lack of understanding concerning the roles and responsibilities of educational psychologists in South Africa.

4.2.4.1 Subtheme 4.1: Reflection has value for personal and professional development

Participants' retrospective experiences as ASL students in the FLY project revealed an appreciation for the opportunities they had to reflect on their development as educational psychologists. The value of reflection during, as well as after, the ASL practicum was linked to long-term gains. Participants from all seven cohorts commented on the significance that reflections had in encouraging personal growth as well as establishing a professional identity.

Group reflection sessions enriched the learning process by creating an opportunity for participants to self-reflect while at the same time learning from each other's reflections: "*I found the reflection sessions very informative and also just very nice for personal growth. I learned a lot about myself and a lot of . . . and I learned a lot from other people, you know*" (P2, lines 168-170). Another participant enjoyed the group reflections, yet felt that students were often reluctant to share their thoughts in front of the group: *"I loved the debriefing sessions though I hated them too as most of us did not talk about the negative things or the mistakes we made as we wanted to get good marks"* (P17, lines 36-37).

Participants also learned about the invaluable practice of continuous reflection required in the field of psychology: "*This experience helped me to develop insight into how to be a psychologist – learning how to step back and reflect OFTEN!"* (P19, lines 44-45). However, continuous reflection appealed more to some participants than to others. For some it became tiring, while others embraced every opportunity to reflect: "*If I remember what some of the students complained about a little, then it was all the reflection sessions, but I personally found it valuable"* (P1, I4, T, lines 100-102). He further explained: "*I am a very reflective person, so I think reflections did me good*" (P1, I4, T, line 272).

Reflection allowed participants the freedom to express their thoughts about key questions regarding their engagement with the partner-school. One of the participants shared some of the thoughts that emerged during her personal reflections that challenged her professional development: *"I remember wondering how we would be able to provide emotional support. My big question was what is good enough? In the absence of very individualized career guidance and counseling services in communities like this, what could we do that was good enough? Was our intervention good enough?"* (P19, lines 25-28).

Furthermore, reflections contributed to enhanced confidence in a professional capacity: *"It [this practicum] actually had a lot to play with my self-esteem and self-confidence and myself as a psychologist, because it taught me a lot and it taught me that I can actually do this outside of the safety of the University of Pretoria, you know"* (P2, lines 116-118). In addition, self-reflection and introspection enhanced participants' sense of self-efficacy: "*So what I really*

liked is that I learned about myself there and I learned that I am capable of doing this career. I am capable of being an educational psychologist" (P2, I1, lines 179-181).

Reflecting on personal biases and potential blind spots when working with clients was mentioned as another long-term benefit. One participant reflected on the self-awareness she gained by identifying an area of difficulty for her: *"It was very difficult for me to work with teenage girls! However, now that I work in a school and I have to work with all children, I am glad I had that experience and know enough about myself and them to be able to work productively with any age/gender child"* (P12, lines 58-62).

Another participant explained how reflecting on the whole ASL experience led her to adopt a more positive approach to psychology: "*Indirectly it [the ASL experience] taught me, both personally and professionally (as a psychologist) to be more positive and to search for and focus more on the positive than the negative without disregarding the negative"* (P4, lines 36-38).

4.2.4.2 Subtheme 4.2: Competence in cross-cultural assessment and intervention is increased

In this subtheme participants' experiences related to cross-cultural competence in a rural setting are explored. Participants gained invaluable exposure to the use of dynamic, informal assessment, and therapy tools and benefitted from learning skills often required when working with learners in multi-cultural and resource-constrained environments. Participants from all cohorts, except the 2012 cohort, mentioned the benefits of learning to assess and do therapy in a cross-cultural sense.

Flexibility and adaptability were often mentioned as areas of growth that participants experienced during the ASL practicum: "*I gained from using different types of activities with my learner group, from learning to be flexible and adaptable, taking my cue from the learners and learning to let the learners set the pace"* (P19, lines 34-36). The ability to constantly adjust to clients' needs was exercised: "*I had some ideas of what I thought I would need to address, however re-adjusted my perspective and my approach as the students communicated their goals, dreams, strengths and questions"* (P7, lines 23-25).

These skills enabled participants to fully understand the essence of dynamic assessment: "*You learn about dynamic assessment which shows you how important it is in our future practice as psychologists"* (P21, lines 28-30). Furthermore, participants gained experience in integrating formal and informal techniques in working with a diverse learner group: "*It also amazed me that when working in groups it was sometimes the 'small things' that made a big*

89

difference – who sat where, how I interacted with the group vs with individuals and the importance of incorporating formal and informal activities" (P7, lines 29-31).

Creative, personalised approaches were explored in order to accommodate diverse learner needs: "*I enjoyed that we did not only use standardised assessments and that we had to be creative in the way we 'assessed' the students. This is a vital tool as a psychologist as every client is different and might require a different approach*" (P11, lines 34-36). Participants benefitted from the opportunity to explore alternative assessment tools seldom used during clinical training in a university context: "*FLY is also beneficial because it encourages/forces students out of their comfort zones with regards to using standardised psychometric tests to gather information about the 'client'. Making use of post-modern and non-verbal techniques are far more valuable in the context of FLY*" (P12, lines 18-21).

Since most of the assessments and interventions were career-related, participants developed skills in providing career guidance to learners in a multi-cultural setting: "*I gained from learning to administer tests to big groups. I gained from really trying to be honest in the types of recommendations I made to the learners about career options, and in trying to give them information on alternatives they may not have known about*" (P19, lines 40-43). Participants were given the freedom to *"think outside the box"* (P8, line 16) in career counselling and could practically apply the career narrative approach.

Participants who are currently working in multi-cultural settings were particularly appreciative of the experience at the rural school, as it prepared them as professionals for working with clients from diverse backgrounds in their everyday life:

> *This experience enabled me to work more effectively in my current situation. I work here in Tanzania with people, expats and local Tanzania's [sic], with different cultures and languages then mine...the people first of all speak a different language then me, their English understanding is limited and the different tribes in Tanzania is very serious about their culture...So the FLY experience taught me how to be flexible and respectful regarding my basic interactions, psychological interventions, communication and relationship building. These skills I use on a daily basis when I work in the community but also in the corporate environment* (P6, line 31-41).

4.2.4.3 Subtheme 4.3: There is engagement with the roles and responsibilities of educational psychologists in South Africa

The ASL practicum prompted participants to consider the various roles of educational psychologists in South Africa, as well as the responsibilities that accompany these roles. A deeper understanding of how educational psychologists fit into the "bigger picture" of social transformation was cultivated through their involvement in a higher education community engagement partnership. For this subtheme, participants from the following cohorts contributed to the findings: 2007, 2008, 2010, 2011, and 2013.

In reflecting on the long-term benefits of his ASL practicum, one participant appreciated the impact that the project had on challenging his views on the role of the educational psychologist in helping individuals and communities: *"But that it's more a case of we do have to look at people as already having the abilities, already having the potential. We're just a very small tool that can sort of help to open that. And not only people, communities as well"* (P18, I2, lines 36-39). Another participant became aware of the contribution he might be able to make towards the future of the country: "*So it brings a person in contact with oneself again to reach out and in terms of what you believe, how you think and it's nice to see that you can make a positive difference in building up the country and I think this specific project lends itself to it"* (P1, I4, T, lines 58-60).

Through discussions with other students in educational psychology, participants are able to gain a fresh perspective on the value that this field of psychology has to add in the country: "*You get to bounce ideas of [sic] one another and truly sense how each person perceives educational psychology as our field of excellence and how it can contribute value to a positive South Africa"* (P21, lines 23-25). Raw insight into the limitations and benefits of working as an educational psychologist in a rural setting was identified as a partnership strength by one of the participants: "*For me personally it was understanding both the pitfalls and positive aspects of providing educational psychological services and partnering with communities in a rural setting"* (P10, lines 6-7).

During ASL, participants became aware of the responsibility that educational psychologists have in terms of social justice: "*It [the FLY partnership] allows the ASL-students to 'think out of the box' and to become aware of the South African reality and their social responsibility towards other fellow South Africans. It encourages these students to use their knowledge and skills for social justice and community growth not just as students but also in the future as practicing psychologists"* (P4, lines 16-20). Many participants expressed increased motivation to become involved in community engagement work and projects after completing their ASL practicum: "*...it [the FLY project] awakened something in me, sort of an awareness that you*

91

ASL broadened participants' horizons in terms of the impact they can have on society outside of the private sector:

> *On a more sort of personal level it was also great because it helps provide sort of a bigger picture perspective in terms of what psychology can be within South Africa. It has a far greater reach than probably you get in just your typical psychological setting. You know, people have private practice and there are only so many who can afford private practice. You work in say, a specific type of facility. It's almost...the reach of psychologists is almost limited by themselves. So this was great, because it shows, you know, this is what you know tangibly psychology can be, you know, if we actually broaden those horizons* (P16, I3, lines 52-59).

However, although many participants endorsed the sentiment that educational psychologists should become more involved in community engagement, the barriers to these potential engagements are often not acknowledged. One participant provided a sober perspective on the challenges faced by educational psychologists who intend to extend their services into rural communities:

> *Now that I'm "out there" in the workplace though, in terms of working as an educational psychologist in settings such as the partner-school – practicing in community engagement, I have yet to find any advertised jobs for ed psychs in this sector (government or NGO). Thus I assume one would have to do pro-bono work in rural or and/or communities with limited financial resources. So I wonder, for psychologists who want to be involved with community engagement programmes, how do you really go about it after university? You can't earn a living off pro-bono work all the time. So yes, loved the experience of the Fly programme but if it is opening our eyes to how we can potentially assist within community programmes in the future, then how does an educational psychologist accomplish this while still earning a living?* (P10, lines 33-42).

4.2.4.4 Discussion of findings for Theme 4

In this study, participants perceived ASL as useful in initiating the construction of a professional identity as educational psychologist. In short, professional identity can be defined

as a person's self-conceptualisation as a professional that "serves as a frame of reference from which one carries out a professional role, makes significant professional decisions, and develops as a professional" (Brott & Myers, 1999, p.339). According to Brott and Myers (1999), literature shows that the development of a professional identity starts during the training of professionals, grows during entry into the profession and matures during increased identification with the profession. A study by Simons et al. (2012) revealed that field supervisors are cognisant of the benefits of a rich ASL experience in terms of students gaining confidence in clinical judgement and further developing a professional identity.

Years after their practicum, participants still valued the impact that reflections during ASL had on their personal and professional development. The notion of reflections as a critical tool leading to meaningful ASL experience is well-substantiated in literature (e.g. Bender & Jordaan, 2007; Bringle & Hatcher, 1999; Mouton & Wildschut, 2005; Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009; Roos et al., 2005). Participants in this study harnessed the benefits of reflection as they learned from other students' thought processes, grew in self-knowledge, and experienced increased confidence in their professional capacity as educational psychologists. Gains related to student reflections were also identified in previous studies; it was perceived as a positive factor in processing their experiences in relation to the academic material (Astin et al., 2000) and contributing to on-going personal development (Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009).

Increased cross-cultural competence as a professional skill was reported by participants as an area of growth. Roos et al. (2005) emphasise the value of ASL in diverse community contexts to facilitate the mastering of new knowledge and skills meaningfully. Data revealed that participants acquired skills in using dynamic, informal assessment and therapy tools that allowed them to tailor services to learners from a variety of backgrounds. The theme of students' perceived increases in competence is endorsed in literature, as Simons et al.'s (2012) study showed that most students thought that their understanding of psychology theories was intensified and application of cultural competence improved during an undergraduate psychology practicum.

By giving students an opportunity to develop initiative, creativity, and flexibility in the face of novel and challenging situations, the ASL experience influences students' attitudes towards and involvement in community engagement activities, as well as their perceptions of their own community engagement skills (Moely et al., 2002). Increased confidence in one's capacity to demonstrate cross-cultural skills was mentioned by some participants in this study. This is corroborated in a study which found that students reported enhanced confidence in their ability to communicate with diverse people groups and to understand value systems of people from diverse backgrounds (Ellerton et al., 2015).

Looking back on their ASL experiences, participants reported increased understanding of the expectations of the roles and responsibilities that educational psychologists need to be mindful of when practicing in the unique context of South Africa. Engelbrecht (2004) argues that a clearer idea of the roles and responsibilities of educational psychologists will position professionals at the interface of educational, psychological, and behavioural systems in order to strengthen the partnership between parents, educators, and communities.

This theme is reiterated in a study that showed students to have reported increased understanding of the "requirements and responsibilities for professional roles" during ASL (Simons et al., 2002, p.332). Furthermore, participants' responses reflected the impact that ASL had on their future career decisions, especially their aspirations to become involved in community engagement by providing educational psychology services in resource-constrained environments. The impact of ASL on plans for future civic action (Moely et al., 2002) and future career or educational pursuits (Kretchmar, 2001) has been highlighted in literature on students' experiences of ASL.

Some areas related to professional development mentioned in previous studies that were not identified as benefits of ASL by participants in the current study, included time management (Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009), report writing (Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009), referrals (Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009), networking (Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009), leadership skills (Mouton & Wildschut, 2005), and ethical/moral decision making (Cress, 2005).

4.3 SUMMARY OF ALL FINDINGS

From the findings it emerged that the results of this study did not contradict the findings of other studies, but rather corroborated with existing literature to a large extent. Similar to other studies, I found that participants' experiences of ASL encompassed an increased awareness of, and engagement with, social justice agenda and civic responsibility (Baldwin et al., 2007; Moely et al., 2002; Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009; Netshandama et al., 2011; Roos et al., 2005) as well as issues of diversity (Ellerton et al., 2015; Mouton & Wildschut, 2005; Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009).

The findings furthermore supported studies on the positive impact of ASL on students' development into competent professionals who are able to use assessment and intervention tools confidently and dynamically in multi-cultural settings (Moely et al., 2002; Simons et al., 2012). In line with existing studies, participants experienced a deeper understanding of the value of a strength-based approach (e.g. Ebersöhn et al., 2010; Garoutte and McCarthy-Gilmore, 2014), the importance of embedding reflection (e.g. Astin et al., 2000; Naidoo &

Devnarain, 2009) and experiential learning (e.g. Carolissen, 2012; Ebersöhn et al., 2010; Ellerton et al., 2015; Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009; Netshandama et al., 2011; Roos et al., 2005; Simons et al., 2012) into the curriculum, and the true extent of the scope of educational psychology professionals' roles and responsibilities in South Africa (e.g. Simons et al., 2002).

Some of the pitfalls of the partnership in relation to ASL, reported by participants in this study, also corroborated with other studies; this included the difficulties related to rapport building arising from language differences (Roos et al., 2005), the impact of limited engagement time on the long-term impact of the partnership (Gerstenblatt & Gilbert, 2004; Mouton & Wildschut, 2005), logistical challenges experienced during the practicum (Burr, 1997; Kretchmar, 2001; Mouton & Wildschut, 2005; Simons et al., 2012), insufficient preparation of students for ASL (Juhn et al., 1999; Moely et al., 2002; Mouton & Wildschut, 2005; Netshandama et al., 2011; Pillay, 2003), and a lack of clearly defined roles and expectations for the student- and rural school partners (Mouton & Wildschut, 2005).

My data was silent on participants' perceived increased involvement and engagement in the rural community following the ASL practicum (Garoutte & McCarthy-Gilmore, 2014). Participants did not report feeling more entrenched in the rural school community after their participation in ASL. Some of the logistical challenges experienced by students in other studies, that were silent in the current study, included difficulties with scheduling with the agency (Kretchmar, 2001), placement issues (Mouton & Wildschut, 2005; Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009), paperwork (Simons et al., 2012), lack of mentors (Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009), limited support from the university (Netshandama et al. 2011), and inadequate security (Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009). In addition, the findings of this study were silent on student benefits in the following areas of professional development: time management, report writing, referrals, and networking (Naidoo & Devnarain, 2009). Similarly, the following areas of training recommended by ASL students in other studies, were silent in this study: working with client groups and applying an ecosystemic perspective to community engagement (Pillay, 2003).

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to explore and describe the retrospective experiences of Master's students in educational psychology who participated in ASL in a higher education-rural school partnership, in order to inform knowledge on higher education community engagement. The findings of this study were discussed in Chapter 4 with reference to the relevant themes and subthemes as they emerged through the process of theme analysis and also provided a literature control for the study.

In this chapter I draw the current study to a conclusion and answer the primary and secondary research questions. The limitations of the study will then be addressed as will the contributions of the study. I conclude the chapter by offering recommendations for further research, practice, and training.

5.2 PRIMARY AND SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the following subsections the conclusion drawn from the study is discussed by answering the research questions in accordance with the findings and existing literature (refer to Chapter 4 for literature control for the study). I will start by revisiting the secondary research questions followed by a reflection on the primary research question.

5.2.1 Secondary research questions

5.2.1.1 What are the academic service learning students' retrospective experiences of the higher education-rural school partnership that they were involved in?

The research contributed to knowledge on different cohorts of ASL students' understanding of a higher education-rural school partnership including the strengths and limitations of the partnership, recommendations for future planning of the partnership, as well as the short-term gains, long-term benefits, and challenges experienced as ASL students in the FLY partnership. Findings revealed that participants offered a unique perspective on the way in which the partnership with the rural school is perceived retrospectively and over a period of seven years.

A new insight is the finding that a diverse group of educational psychology students from various cohorts consistently experienced ASL in a challenging rural context as beneficial to their learning experience. The findings of this study show the retrospective perspectives of students over a period of seven years which adds depth to the cross-sectional views of ASL that have been researched in other studies. As has been found in other studies with ASL students, the themes that emerged indicated participants' perceptions of their ASL practicum in relation to social change, engaged scholarship, curriculum development, and professional identity.

Participants' experience of ASL as deepening their understanding of and commitment to social responsibility in a society marked by persistent diversity, poverty, and disparity (Section 4.2.1.4) has emerged as a theme in similar studies. The participants in this study viewed a social justice framework as critical in their approach to higher education community engagement during the ASL practicum as it lends itself to a sober perspective on how educational psychologists can provide services to marginalised communities without enforcing unequal power relations. Their experience of ASL at a rural school as an enabling environment in which students can engage with diversity echoed findings on ASL experiences in other studies. While ASL students' perceptions of an asset-based approach to community engagement has not received much attention in literature, the participants in this study found it to be valuable to their own learning experience and also expressed the benefits of using it to provide support in rural schools and communities.

Participants furthermore viewed ASL as an opportunity to experience engaged scholarship at grassroots level (Section 4.2.2.4); a theme that has also received attention in other studies on ASL. This is in line with previous studies on higher education community engagement globally that supports the notion of constructing "sustainable empowering learning environments" (Mahlomaholo et al., 2010, p.285). Findings further confirm existing literature on ASL that question the brief time that students often spend in the rural school or community during their practicum. Although previous research has indicated the benefits of knowledge exchange during higher education community engagement, this study added insight into how students perceive reciprocal learning as part of their ASL experience.

While previous studies might have identified students' experience of knowledge construction and exchange on a single level, participants in this study expressed their understanding on three levels: academic and indigenous knowledge exchanged between the students and learners, practical knowledge shared among the ASL student group, and knowledge generated by all role players as part of the research. The study also revealed that participants

conceptualised ASL as holding value for all beneficiaries, including the students, learners, school, and the rural community, which has also been found in other studies.

Consistent with other studies, participants emphasised the importance of including an experiential component into the academic curriculum (Section 4.2.3.5). In the study it was found that participants recognised the critical contribution of ASL to equipping students who are trained as educational psychologists and also the role of students and other beneficiaries in providing feedback that can shape the curriculum. There is strong evidence in other studies that support the value of integrating theoretical knowledge with practical experience during ASL, which was also found in this study. Furthermore, the findings suggest that students often feel ill-prepared for the challenges of working in unfamiliar terrain with rural school learners in terms of prior knowledge, realistic expectations, and practical guidance; this has been similar to the experiences of students in other ASL programmes, suggesting that the preparation of students for the practicum might need to be reconsidered.

Some of the logistical challenges articulated by participants in this study (e.g. long travelling distance, time away from family and work responsibilities, expenses, limited work space at the practicum site, and learner absenteeism) have emerged as findings in similar studies, while difficulties regarding scheduling with the agency, placement issues, paperwork, lack of mentors, limited support from the university, and inadequate security were silent in this study.

Developing their professional identity emerged as the fourth theme of their ASL experience in this study (Section 4.2.4.4) and other studies have also shown ASL to be beneficial to students' conceptualisations of themselves as professionals. Benefits in terms of professional development that emerged in previous studies but were silent in this study included time management, report writing, referrals, networking, leadership skills, and ethical and/or moral decision-making.

The importance of reflection in ASL resonated throughout literature and was also found to be integral to participants' learning experiences as it helped them to actively engage in the process of making sense of the academic content they had been studying prior to the practicum. Similar to previous studies on ASL, the findings revealed that participants experienced increased competence and confidence in their professional capacity to conduct cross-cultural assessments and interventions with diverse groups of learners. In addition, participants experienced the ASL practicum as a safe environment in which they could explore their future roles and responsibilities as educational psychologists in South Africa as well as future career possibilities that promote community engagement in resource scarce settings.

5.2.1.2 How do the experiences compare across cohorts?

Whereas studies on academic service learning often report on students' perspectives from a cross-sectional perspective, the contribution of this study is comparative evidence, by a comparable groups of students, that their experiences of clinical training are consistent.

A new insight was the finding that seven cohorts of students shared similar experiences of their ASL practicum despite having been involved in different phases of the FLY partnership over a period of time. Although the findings of this study revealed that some cohorts were silent on certain subthemes, their experiences of the themes were consistent across cohorts.

5.2.1.3 How can insight into these experiences inform and enhance knowledge on future partnerships?

The current study, which forms part of a larger study that seeks to understand the perspectives of all relevant stakeholders in a university-school partnership, reported on the experiences of the student beneficiaries from the past seven years (2007-2013). It was found that a diverse group of former educational psychology students had consistent retrospective experiences of their ASL practicum, and insight into these experiences could build on existing knowledge of university-school partnerships in the future.

From the findings it appears that higher education community engagement partnerships have the potential to provide multiple benefits to university and rural school partners. It was found that higher education partnerships with rural schools could increasingly emphasise the important role of obtaining feedback from student-beneficiaries a year or more after completing their educational psychology practicums. The value of post-ASL reflections by students, who have entered into various careers in the field of educational psychology, was therefore emphasised in this study.

In addition, findings show that participants were cognisant of how feedback on higher education partnerships with rural schools can shape the development of the academic curriculum for the Master's degree in Educational Psychology. By giving students a voice in the collaborative process of curriculum design, the academic program remains practically relevant to the needs of the students. Although the importance of feedback from all partners has been well-established in literature in general, this finding has not been a strong focus in previous studies on the students' perception of ASL. Therefore, insight into students' experiences of ASL adds to existing knowledge of how the academic curriculum can be shaped in future partnerships so as to become more effective and meaningful to the students and the partner school.

99

From the findings it emerged that participants also encountered some challenges related to the FLY partnership and identified potential areas of growth that confirm previous studies on ASL. Participants were resourceful in suggesting ways to improve the partnership, which primarily centred on investing in the long-term involvement and sustainability of the partnership, as well as reinforcing collaboration between the various departments at the university, the students, the rural school, and other stakeholders such as parents and teachers. Being able to investigate ASL students' experiences of ASL retrospectively provides higher education institutions with the opportunity to plan future programs that may support resource-constrained rural schools in their efforts to promote resilience and to overcome various barriers to education.

5.2.2 Primary research question

5.2.2.1 How can insight into educational psychology students' experiences of their academic service learning in a higher education-rural school partnership inform knowledge on higher education community engagement?

Transformative Learning Theory was useful in gaining an in-depth understanding of the transformative learning process participants followed in constructing meaning of their lived experiences (Mezirow, 1997). The findings of this study indicate that when participants critically reflect on and assess their experiences (Mezirow, 1997) a year or more after completion of their practicum, knowledge on ASL is constructed that can lead to transformation of their own understanding of ASL as well as transformation on a bigger scale as it informs the development of similar partnerships in the future.

Illeris' (2003; 2004) understanding of transformative learning adds further insight to participants' expressions of how they made sense of ASL in the partnership. By being cognisant of the cognitive, emotional and social dimensions of learning during the data analysis process, as proposed by Illeris (2004; see Figure 2.2), I was able to understand their experiences more holistically and comprehensively. My findings supported the notion that traditional learning in an academic sense can be enriched by the qualities associated with transformative learning: "personal development, deeper understanding, and increased tolerance and flexibility" (Illeris, 2015, p.50). Findings showed that participants' experiences of ASL can be used to inform knowledge on higher education community engagement when they are viewed as actively involved in the co-creation of knowledge (Dirkx, 1998).

Findings of this study with regard to students' experiences of ASL seem to mirror the efforts of other studies on higher education community engagement partnerships. Below is a summary of the factors that influence higher education community engagement in a university-

rural school partnership from the student partner's perspective, which was developed out of my understanding of the results and findings of this study:

- Prolonged engagement and collaboration between all role players in a partnership, including teachers, parents, learners, students, and researchers, is needed for meaningful interactions to be established and sustainability to be promoted between the university and the community.

- Higher education community engagement underpinned by a social justice approach, that promotes power sharing between parties, can be conceptualised as a pathway to engaged citizenship and social transformation. In addition, students valued the use of an asset-based framework that focuses on the existing strengths and resources within learners, schools, and communities.

- ASL provides a platform for knowledge co-construction between students, learners, and researchers. Indigenous knowledge and academic knowledge are to be valued as equally important in the process of knowledge exchange and generation.

- The higher education institution has a responsibility to ensure that all beneficiaries are consulted in the development of the ASL component of the academic curriculum, to ensure that the evolving needs of both the student- and rural school partners are met.

- It is important for students to feel prepared when providing educational psychology services in remote settings and they recognise the need for genuine understanding and appreciation of language, cultural, and socio-economic differences prior to engaging with diversity.

- ASL as a form of higher education community engagement is viewed by students as mutually beneficial since learners benefit from the services (e.g. career guidance) they receive and students gain exposure in a resource-constrained setting which develops their cross-cultural assessment and intervention skills.

- Educational psychologists in South Africa have a role and responsibility to engage with learners from diverse economic, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. The value of experiential learning in integrating theory and practice, increasing cultural competence and shaping professional identity, as highlighted in the findings of this study, underscores the need for practical training of educational psychology students in rural schools as part of ASL.

The knowledge received from this study thus adds insight to our understanding of how higher education community engagement is perceived by ASL students when partnering with schools in rural settings. This knowledge may be beneficial to potential partners considering the possibility of initiating a partnership with a rural school. It is possible that knowledge of students' experiences of higher education partnership with rural schools may also inform the way in which lecturers develop and implement the curriculum for the Master's degree in Educational Psychology as they may be able to address any issues related to the partnership that was raised by the participants in the current study.

5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In this section, a number of factors are that were identified as possible limitations of the study are discussed.

5.3.1 Researcher subjectivity

Although all the quality assurance criteria were followed, researcher bias was considered to be a potential challenge as this study relied mainly on my personal constructions and interpretations of the data; in addition, my reflections were not captured in a researcher journal. I addressed this limitation by obtaining feedback from peers and supervisors who challenged any unacknowledged assumptions that I might have (Shenton, 2004) and served as a mirror to reflect my responses to the research process (Morrow, 2005). In addition, member checking was done to ensure that the participants agreed with the identified themes and subthemes (Krefting, 1991; Shenton, 2004).

5.3.2 Limited scope and generalisation

Although this case study looked at several cohorts of students and was therefore not cross-sectional in nature, the study was conducted with a limited number of participants who studied their Master's degree in Educational Psychology at the same university and did their ASL practicum at the same rural school. For this reason, generalisability of the findings cannot be assumed; however, considering that I followed a constructivist route, generalisability was not the aim of the study.

Another aspect related to the scope of the study, which could have influenced the data collection process, was that ASL student experiences were limited to participants from the 2007 to 20013 cohorts, with no students from the 2006 cohort taking part in the study. In addition, the cohorts were not all represented equally (see Table 3.1), with some cohorts

having only one representative in the study, which created challenges when comparing the experiences of students across cohorts. Therefore, comparisons across cohorts were interpreted with caution and did not form the main inquiry in this case study. The participants were also predominantly white female educational psychologists (Figures 3.1 and 3.3), meaning that the study is to some extent limited in terms of demographic representation. However, this reflects the reality of trends in the educational psychology profession in South Africa, which indicates that white females continue to dominate this discipline (Carolissen, Shefer, & Smit, 2015).

Even though I did not intend to generalise the findings, I included an audit trail (Table 3.4) to provide readers with information on decisions made and procedures followed during the research process, as well as rich descriptions of the participants' profiles and retrospective experiences, so that they can decide on the transferability of findings to similar settings (Shenton, 2004).

5.4 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

This study contributes to an existing body of knowledge on how ASL within a higher education-rural school partnership is experienced by various cohorts of educational psychology students after completion of their ASL practicum. Findings suggest that students perceived ASL as a positive experience that benefitted the learners at the rural school, contributed to their own learning process and development, and addressed societal issues of diversity and inequality in the unique context of rural communities.

The findings of the study may further render a contribution with regard to the role of students' experiences of ASL in improving future partnerships. Findings indicated that students have a valuable contribution to make when decisions are made on how to strengthen partnerships between higher education and rural schools in the future. It is therefore imperative to consider students' point of view, along with consultation with other beneficiaries, especially as it pertains to the central role of ASL in ensuring sustainable and long-term engagement with the communities. The study revealed factors that both support and hamper the successful running of a partnership between universities and rural schools.

Moreover, this study serves to highlight how insight into students' experiences of a higher education-rural school partnership can inform and enhance knowledge on higher education community engagement. Findings revealed that understanding higher education community engagement from the perspective of students who reflect on their retrospective experiences of ASL provides further insight into how community engagement can be achieved through the training of educational psychologists in rural settings.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

At the conclusion of this study, I present some recommendations for future research, practice, and training.

5.5.1 Recommendations related to future research

In the light of the findings from this study, the following recommendations with regard to future research are proposed:

- This study suggests a second instrumental case study on students' experiences of ASL in a higher education-rural school partnership using a larger sample size.

- Another suggestion is that focus groups are conducted in order to give participants the opportunity to share their retrospective experiences with each other and to create a platform for discussing the issues raised during the current study in more depth. A comparative study of this nature could reveal more clearly how students from different year groups experienced the partnership and how the partnership has transformed over the years.

- Another suggestion is that a similar study with educational psychology students from multiple universities who completed their ASL practicums in a variety of remote school settings is conducted to support these findings further.

- It is recommended that further research be conducted on students' experiences of the asset-based approach to higher education community engagement in a university-school partnership.

5.5.2 Recommendations related to practice

Universities considering forming a partnership with a rural school as part of the ASL program could use this study as a starting point for the planning, implementation, and maintenance of the partnership, as well as to gain insight into which factors are considered important to the student partner. In addition, the themes highlighted in this study could help higher education institutions wishing to improve and enhance their partnerships with rural schools by enhancing their understanding of how students experience ASL in a rural setting.

Furthermore, professionals and students practising in the field of educational psychology could use the insights of this study when engaging with clients from different language and cultural backgrounds to that of the therapist. The therapist could use the experiences of the

students in this study to improve his or her competence in working with client groups and doing cross-cultural psychological assessment and intervention in a remote school.

5.5.3 Recommendations related to training

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that ASL forms part of the training for postgraduate students in educational psychology. This training could form part of an on-going collaborative partnership between the university and the rural community so as to ensure sustainability and continuity in the future. In addition, the importance of social justice and asset-based approaches to higher education community engagement, as suggested by the research findings, implies that students could benefit from being trained in those frameworks before commencing with their ASL. Furthermore, training of educational psychology students could ensure that expectations of the partnership are clearly communicated to all partners and that students are adequately prepared for potential challenges that might arise when working in a rural setting.

5.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the educational psychology students' experiences of ASL as part of a higher education-rural school partnership. Through a qualitative research design, this case study explored the themes which emerged when multiple cohorts of Master's students in educational psychology shared their experiences of ASL, as well as how insight into these themes can inform higher education community engagement. The findings revealed a number of identified themes that encapsulate the participants' experiences of ASL. As a result, a clearer understanding of higher education community engagement from the student's point of view was obtained which can be translated into improved partnerships with remote schools. Researchers and practitioners already involved or wishing to become involved in university-school partnerships could benefit from an understanding of the various trends emerging from ASL, and may in turn apply the findings of this study in their own case studies on higher education community engagement.

As a researcher and educational psychologist in training, I express the hope that this case study will contribute not only to the existing body of knowledge on how students perceive ASL in a university-rural school partnership, but also to the critical importance of higher education community engagement that benefits all partners, promotes social justice, and ultimately leads to transformation in education and society.

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105

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Extracts from my own reflections of ASL visits

Appendix B: Informed consent form

Appendix C: Example of email invitation to participants

Appendix D: Demographic questionnaire

Appendix E: Questionnaire

Appendix F: Example of transcribed interview

Appendix G: Example of thematic analysis process

Appendix H: Example of initial coding

Appendix I: Example of cross-cohort analysis

Appendix J: Examples of member checking

Appendix A: Extracts from my own reflections of ASL visits

<u>INA-MARI DU TOIT – ASL REFLECTION</u>

There will always be power imbalances in this world. The part of my practicum devoted to school-based community engagement has been a doorway into understanding social justice, rural education and diversity against the backdrop of a rural school. It was a group effort among all the EPITS (Educational Psychologists in Training) and we were encouraged to access and mobilize all the assets and strengths within ourselves to make the FLY experience as valuable as possible for our clients. We became resilient in the face of challenges and obstacles, never keeping our eyes off the greater vision:

Rural School Practicum

Reader Reflections

Social justice and community engagement

"Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the places you can, at all times you can, to all people you can, as long as you ever can."

-Charles Wesley-

The above-mentioned quote has set my mind racing. What good can I do? To whom? Where? By which means? How can I put my knowledge to good use and at the same time earn the much-needed experience?

When I started on the first reader, I quickly became immersed in the rich literature reviews as it is of particular interest for the research I am conducting for my dissertation. Looking at the experiences of ASL students as part of a rural school-higher education partnership, my study is embedded within a firm conceptualisation of social justice and community engagement. These articles enriched my knowledge of studies similar to mine, engaged me in the discourse on community engagement practicums and increased my awareness on social justice issues that are addressed during partnerships such as FLY.

Firstly, I have come to realize the significant role played by community engagement in bridging the gap between the so-called academic "ivory tower" and the hands-on practical exposure of working alongside a community at grassroots. For such a partnership to become a reality, the vision must be a long-term, mutually beneficial investment that draws on the strengths and assets of all partners. By thoughtfully combining the textbook- and lecture-acquired knowledge of students with the indigenous knowledge systems of the rural school through collaboration, social change can occur in both. Mutual goals of transformation can only be achieved by exploring the authentic needs of myself and the community.

Secondly, the term social justice has come to mean much more than fairness and equality in society. Social justice is a contextual issue that needs to be understood against the unique backdrop of historical events in a society. It is a powerful tool that can spark hope and a better future in our quest for improving the human condition globally. Instead of shying away from power relationships, social justice explores, embraces, harnesses and addresses it by ensuring non-discriminatory distribution of powers and resources. The ever-widening gap between rich and poor in our country calls for careful consideration on how these two worlds can be bridged. I believe psychologists has a role to play in achieving this objective.

Social justice and care together constitute the cement that ensures safe and strong building blocks for ethical and multi-cultural engagement with marginalised groups. Social justice promotes equal participation by all groups of society, including those who 'serve' and those 'providing a service', a distinction that could easily ruin a long-term partnership. By continually reflecting on my role as 'carer' and my involvement in social problems, I will be able to identify and effectively deal with my own cultural and/or power agendas that could impede fair practice. At the end of my ASL experience, I would like to be more equipped in meeting the needs and utilising the strengths posed by the diversity in our country. I look forward to occupying a small space in the pursuit of social justice.

Rural education and the educational psychologist

In an effort to promote social justice, the educational psychologist should become the 'voice' for those who are marginalised and silenced by overpowering society and government structures. Rural schools have unique teaching conditions that are not deemed favourable in the Western sense of the word and can consequently pose risks to effective learning and psychosocial well-being. Research emphasize the importance of a close, supportive relationship between the educational psychologist and rural school in facilitating resilience. In the FLY project, this is achieved by having an on-going partnership with the school principal, learners, teachers and parents.

As educational psychologists, we must act as responsible citizens by becoming concerned with rural education. One way to do this, is to become involved in development of education policies, research and intervention programs that promote well-being, health care, and career guidance. Another way would be to facilitate awareness of the wealth of resources and assets that already exist within the community. When teachers and learners become active agents in identifying assets, seeds of change will be sown that can grow into strong trees that can provide shade, if nurtured correctly. Multidisciplinary teams can also serve as a respected tool in capitalizing on the expertise in various related fields that could complement and supplement each other in paving a way forward.

Despite the rife percentage of the South African population living in rural areas, the vast majority of educational psychologists prefer doing their internships in an urban context. This could be due to misconceptions about working in a rural setting, as well as real fears about safety and remuneration. These perceptions need to be addressed and ASL practicums have a key role to play in facilitating attitudinal change.

Psychology and diversity

During our practicum, we will be working with vulnerable children. When I say "vulnerable children", I am not seeing children shaped by negative life events and social situations that must be patronized. I am seeing a group of people conceptualized in terms of their assets, resources and capacities. Overlooking the protective factors in these learners' lives would be an injustice in itself and place undue restrictions on an individual that is meant to be seen holistically. One major challenge in rural communities is coping with HIV/AIDS. What can sometimes be deemed as a hopeless situation, psychologists can turn into an opportunity for promoting qualities such as resilience and sense of self in children from high-risk homes. This can be achieved by means of practical sustainability in psychological programs supporting vulnerable children and their families.

In order to address diverse complexities typically found in a rural setting, a narrative approach can be helpful in terms of career counselling. A constructivist, postmodern approach draws on social realities that allow us as educational psychologists to engage with people's life stories. It is inevitable that we will encounter diversity when facilitating career resilience and for this reason it is paramount that we invest in inclusive, holistic and contextual career counselling practices.

Career resilience, as a response to shifts in the world of work, is an emerging concept that immediately resonated with me. I am of the conviction that career resilience should be

cultivated from a young age in rural, diverse settings, where learners need to resist and adapt to disruptive or discouraging career circumstances in a less than optimal environment. By equipping them with the skills to deal with career challenges, we are enabling them to take ownership of their future.

Conclusion

The readings given to us to prepare us for the practicum has opened up my eyes to the benefits of educational psychologists entering into a partnership with rural communities in order to provide support to children who cannot afford the services offered by professionals. I am grateful that I have been afforded the opportunity to experience ASL and will reflect on this learning experience to make sure new knowledge is being crystallized into my existing frame of reference.

Retrospective Experiences

First visit: Assessment

Our first visit started off with very inspiring reflection session with our lecturers. They encouraged us with their words and hearing about all the other EPITS' fears and prospects about our visit, created a platform for normalizing our feelings. The expressive arts activity lead by Prof. Carien stimulated my thinking around my own dreams to fly and activated my creativity and sense of self in preparation for the next two days.

I had five clients and they seemed very excited about the visit. Our day started off with the name and surname activity, during which my clients eagerly shared the meaning of their names/surnames and also chose any name that they would want to be called. Language posed some barriers to understanding my clients, but my selection of assessment media allowed for a wide repertoire of media that did not necessarily require verbal output.

My clients seemed to prefer the creative expressive arts media, such as the sand trays and drawings. The sand trays and accompanying narratives provided me with particularly rich information about the clients' inner worlds and I think it was a very valuable tool. The choice of media seemed well-suited for my clients and I also became innovative in developing a new assessment after my first day with my clients. This activity was embedded in the clients' natural environment. I asked them to draw a "kraal" and to write down all the things that keep them safe or protected inside the kraal. These could be strengths, assets or resources. Outside the

kraal, they had to write down things that threaten their safety, or that they see as challenges. I used one of my fellow students to interpret the instructions into their language.

On reflection, I was made aware of one of my blind spots. Since I had only one girl in my group, I immediately felt a connection with her, more than with the others. I realised that I subconsciously favoured her because of her gender, and perhaps because she seemed withdrawn between all the boys in the group. Another area I identified that could be improved on was time management. I had to learn to balance group activities with one-on-one activities where I could explore clients' thoughts and feelings in more depth. I wanted to make sure that everyone experience the safety of talking to me in privacy.

Second visit: Intervention

I was disappointed to find that some of my clients were not present during my second visit to the rural school. I was looking forward to sharing their reports with them and using our time together to build on the first visit. I longed to encourage them. I had to put my feelings aside and invest all my energy in the ones that were there.

They appeared to enjoy the things I wrote in the report and they seemed to agree with the things I said about them. This communicated to me that the language was accessible to them and that I provided a true reflection of their dreams, thoughts and feelings. My peer supervisor and I jointly developed our intervention plan that was aimed at exploring the client's identity on three levels: Personal, career and academic.

These activities addressed the key themes that we identified during the first visit. The worksheet took on a very practical approach, touching on topics such as entry-level requirements, financial support and barriers and bridges that might be encountered on their career journey.

Conclusion

My time at the rural school stretched my limits in terms of assessment and therapy. Worlds apart from the clinic work at the university, I had to adapt to the unique challenges of a rural setting, such as lack of stationary, different ways of perceiving the world, and limited career possibilities. I learned that providing career facilitation in a rural setting requires dealing with these challenges creatively and experientially. I would like to be involved in similar partnerships in the future. If I can stay present in the moment, connect with my clients authentically, and use all resources at my disposal to facilitate well-being, the sky's the limit!

Appendix B: Informed consent form

Faculty of Education

Individual consent for participation in a Research Study
A research project of the University of Pretoria
Project title: Flourishing Learning Youth

Invitation to participate

We would like to invite you …………….………………………… to participate in a research study. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. However, in order to take part in this research you will be requested to sign this consent form which gives you permission to participate in this study.

Description of the research

This study aims to capture your experiences of an on-going higher-education community engagement partnership with rural schools. Furthermore, we would like to understand what in this partnering relationship is not working and also how it should be done differently to strengthen the partnership in future.

Risk and Inconvenience

We do not foresee any risks in your participation of this study. If any problems do arise we will avail ourselves to you and ensure that you comprehend all the proceedings and feel comfortable to continue in the study. Your identity will not be revealed to anyone and any information that we acquire from this study will be kept confidential.

Confidentiality

All the information we acquire from this study will be kept strictly confidential and will only be made available to the research team. No information will be shared with anyone else. The only exception is if there is a serious problem concerning your safety or that of any other person in which case we are required to inform the appropriate agency. If such a concern does arise, we will ensure that we discuss the matter with you before taking action. Please note that none of the questions in this study are designed to collect information that will require us to contact anyone. All the information obtained from this study will be stored in locked files in research offices at the University of Pretoria.

Because confidentiality is important we would expect that any information that you provide also remain confidential and that you would not discuss this information with anyone.

Benefits

We hope that knowledge generated from this study may benefit theory building on higher education programmes and partnership studies. There are no financial benefits to this study.

What are the rights of the participant in this study?

Participation in this study is purely voluntary and any participant, can at any time during the study, may refuse and discontinue their participation without any given reason. You will not be affected in any way, should you decide not to participate or to discontinue your participation in the study.

Has this study received ethical approval?

This study has been approved by the Education Faculty Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria. (Ethics Reference Number: **EP 07/02/04 FLY 13-004**).

Questions

Please feel free to ask about anything that is unclear and take as long as you feel necessary before making a decision about whether or not to give consent to take part in the study. If you perhaps have any further questions that may arise later on in the study feel free to contact my supervisor Prof. L. Ebersöhn at, 012 420 2337 or you may contact me at, 076 3718750 or by e-mail: inamari.dutoit@gmail.com

Informed Consent

I hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature, conduct, risks and benefits of this study. I have also read or have had someone read to me the above information regarding this study and that I understand the information that has been given to me. I am aware that the results and the information about this study will be processed anonymously. I may, at any stage, without any prejudice, withdraw my consent to participate in this study. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare that I may participate in this study.

(a)   Writing your name below means that you voluntarily consent to participate in the project and that you are aware of what will happen to you in this study. If you decide to withdraw from the study, all you need to do is inform the principal investigator, Prof. L. Ebersöhn.

Name: _____ (Please print)

Signature: _____ Date: _____

(b)   [1]Writing your name below means that you voluntarily consent that we may take audio recordings of you during the project and share these during discussions as well as in reports that we may write about this project. We will not share your name with the people who hear these recordings.

Name: _____ (Please print)

Signature: _____ Date: _____

I, _____ herewith confirm that the person above has been fully informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

If you have any further questions about this study, you may contact the principal investigator, Prof. L. Ebersöhn at 012 420 2337. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant you may contact the University of Pretoria Education Faculty Ethics committee at 012 339 8612.

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[1] This point is only relevant for face-to-face or telephonic interviews.

Appendix C: Example of email invitation to participants

2007   'FLY hello!

1 message

Liesel Ebersohn <Liesel.Ebersohn@up.ac.za>   Fri, 25 Jul 2014 at 15:13
To:

Cc: Ina-Mari du Toit <inamari.dutoit@gmail.com>

Hello 2007 MEds! It's been awhile since we all went to   - you were the 2nd group ever (see attached photo!) - now it's 8 years on and your trend started a wave in the training.

I would like to ask if you could please take a small amount of time to assist Ina-Mari du Toit (copied in the email) with data collection for her study.

This would require either:
1. scheduling a short interview (face-to-face or telephonic) with her on five questions together with a concise demographic questionnaire, or
2. alternatively completing the questionnaire and demographic form and emailing it to us.

For your convenience relevant documents are attached, including a document for informed consent.

Please do let us know what would be most convenient to you.
really looking forward to hearing from you and what you have been up to.
best
Liesel

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Education

FLY Demographic Questionnaire

A. _Particulars_		
Questionnaire number _(Administration use only)_		
Interviewee surname and name		
Date of birth		

General Instructions
Tick the box where necessary, or answer the question in the space provided

1. _Gender (Tick one)_	Male	Female

2. _Ethnicity (Tick one)_	
Black	
White	
Coloured	
Indian	
Other (Specify):	

3. _Ages (Tick one)_	
Below 30 years	
30-40 years	
41-50 years	
51-60 years	
61-70 years	

4.	Language proficiency (Tick appropriate options)	
Afrikaans		
English		
isiNdebele		
isiZulu		
isiXhosa		
Sepedi		
Sesotho		
Setswana		
Shona		
Siswati		
Tshivenda		
Other (Specify):		

5.	Where do you live? (Tick one)	
Gauteng		
Another province (Specify):		
Another country (Specify):		

6.	What is your highest post-graduate level of education? (Tick One)	
Masters		
PhD		
Other (Specify):		

7.	Reflect on your career as educational psychologist:.
List jobs and years in which you did this.	
List any community engagement or pro bono work you have been involved in.	

8.	In which year did you do your practicum in the FLY project? (Tick one)	
2006		
2007		

2008	
2009	
2010	
2011	
2012	
2013	

9.	*Reflect on the Grade 8 or 9 client-group for whom you were an educational-psychologist-in-training.*	
	Please identify group size by ticking the relevant row, as well as gender composition of the group:	
Less than 5 clients		
5-10 clients		
More than 10 clients		
All boy-group		
All girl group		
Mixed gender group		

10.	*Are you currently involved with the FLY project? (Tick one)*	*Yes*	*No*
If so, specify how are you involved?			

11.	*What do you believe this partnership to be about? (Tick appropriate option/s)*	
Academic service learning.		
Postgraduate research.		
Higher education community engagement.		
Knowledge generation.		
Social justice.		
Other foci:		

Appendix E: Questionnaire

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

ERA Unit - Unit for Education Research in AIDS
Department of Educational Psychology
Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria

Student experiences of a long-term higher education partnership[2] with rural schools

Conducted by: Ina-Mari du Toit

Supervised by: Dr Ruth Mampane & Prof. L. Ebersöhn

Name & Surname: _____

Current affiliation: _____

Year(s) participating in FLY[3] Project: _____

Based on your time and experience as ASL student, please answer the following questions. Please give examples to enrich your answers.

1. What do you know about the FLY-partnership?

_____
_____
_____
_____

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[2] CEC12091412827
[3] Flourishing Learning Youth (FLY)-partnership with the secondary school in Mpumulanga, and other Gert Sibande district schools.

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2. What are the strengths of the FLY partnership?

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3. What are the limitations of the FLY-partnership?

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4. What do you think is required for future planning in FLY?

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5. Please reflect on your retrospective experiences as ASL-student in the FLY project (what did you enjoy most in the short term, which gains have benefited you in the long-term, what did you find challenging, what did you dislike…..)

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Appendix F: Example of transcribed interview

Date: 4/8/2012

Cohort: 2007

Gender: Female

Place: University of Pretoria, Groenkloof Campus

Researcher:	Based on your time and experience as an ASL student at the partner-school, please answer the following questions. So the first one would be: What do you know about the FLY partnership?
Participants::	I know that the FLY partnership has been happening for a long time. It's a partnership with Liesel, Ronél as well and I think there are other colleagues from the university of Pretoria who are actually involved in the process and not only from the Educational Psychology Department, but also from other departments you know, on campus. And they're working in conjunction with the high school, but I know it's actually broadened and there's more schools involved. So at the beginning I know, well as a student what we began is we started doing career. It was part of our career practicum that we had to do. So we would go out there. We had two visits with the schools and we assessed the schools informally and then, also gave them information about different careers and what I know is that it's actually grown from that and there's a lot of projects that they're involved in, specifically related to HIV and AIDS if I'm not mistaken. And I know that Liesel is also specifically focussing on resilience and HIV and AIDS so I think they found that that was a challenge that the community was dealing with and that's something they've now been focussing on and how to empower the community with regards to information and knowledge and HIV and AIDS and how they can actually help their own community members and community members it's parents and learners within the community. But I do know that the school now. . . the teachers there have also gone and taken their model and I think are also teaching it to other schools from what I understand. Yes (laughs).
Researcher:	That's a mouthful! (laughs) Anything you want to add?
Participant:	I'm thinking. I think that's what it is. It's a collaboration with the University of Pretoria and schools. I don't know in which province to be honest. . .
Researcher:	Mpumulanga.
Participant:	In Mpumulanga and the whole initiative is to empower the students, the learners there and also the communities. That's what I know it's about.
Researcher:	OK. Let's move on to the next question. So what would you say the strengths of this partnership are?
:	What I really liked about it as a student, just thinking back, is that you learn a lot with regards to flexibility and adaptability. I think when you are in a controlled situation like you are at the

	practical centre here that we have at UP, everything goes according to plan and you have all the information. So usually you have an intake interview with the parents, then you assess the child and then you have a feedback and you go and have therapy and that doesn't happen at the partner-school. You go there and you don't know what's going to happen. I mean you know you're supposed to have assessments and well the main aim in my year was to do career assessments and do give information about careers and everything, but when we got there we realized for example we didn't speak the same language as the learners. That was something I had to adapt to quickly. I mean when I was there I realised I created relationships with the teachers there so they could help me, you know, in translating from English to Siswati. Thankfully in our group as well, we had a girl. . . a woman from Swaziland so she also became. . . yah, we were very lucky to have her. So she helped us a lot. So the whole process really helped me to be adaptable and knowing that things can go wrong in therapy. Sometimes you won't always have all that information, because remember when we see the learners we don't see their parents, so we don't get any background information about them. We don't speak to the teachers, so we don't have any background knowledge at all, so it's about working with what you have. (Pause) And I really liked that. It really challenged me in that way, knowing that things change and if things change it's ok, don't panic. Just change your assessment approach or how you engage with the clients so that you can get information in order to help them. So, for me that was the biggest strength and I think also just diversity. I mean a lot of the clients we work with here are usually white, you know, and they have the basic problems, but then you go into a totally different area and you come into contact with different racial groups and cultural groups and that also taught me you have to take that into consideration when you're working with clients. You need to understand their racial backgrounds. You need to understand their cultural backgrounds and their language backgrounds in order to assess them. So I thought you know, in a South African context, you know, where it's so multi-racial, it's important to have that exposure to different racial groups.
Researcher:	Any other strengths?
Participant:	Let me think. . .
Researcher:	Of the FLY partnership, you know, in general, not necessarily just the. . .
Participant:	I think it's . . what I like about it, is that if you think about it, it takes on a social justice approach. So what I really liked is that when there were challenges that the teachers brought to Liesel or Ronél, they themselves came up with the solutions and that's something very nice. I think we learn a lot about community engagement but we always have this perspective that we are the ones who are coming to help them and to save them and what I liked about his project in particular, that was not the case, is that we were there. We were facilitators. We were mediators of the whole process. And specifically because I'm knowledgeable about the HIV and AIDS project. . . and specifically with that project I liked really the fact that we came in, we identified the challenges, but they came up with solutions to those challenges and they came up even with more assets to deal with their challenges and so far they've implemented so much, you know. The garden, the different projects they have within the school. I think

	that's amazing. I think community engagement should be about that. That, at the end of the day if UP leaves that situation, they should be able to sustain what they've already started. And that's something I really like.
Researcher:	Ok. And then on the flipside of the coin . . . limitations?
Participant:	I would just say it's far. For me to take time off was a bit hard. Initially my first PhD topic, I was involved with that project and for me to take time off work it's really, it's hard sometimes. I mean once you're there it's amazing. it's an amazing experience, but just the time off work and you're life in general. It's a bit difficult to travel all that way to do the work there and I also find it difficult to just keep in touch sometimes with the teachers, you know. You're so far away. So, sometimes when you come back, it's more of a let's catch up and see what's been going on, you know, and it would be nice to have maybe daily interactions. Obviously that's not possible. That's something I would hope, but I think that would be the only negative: that it's a bit far and if you're working it's just hard to balance it with your studies and work and life. That's all I can think of.
Researcher:	Ok, awesome. And then what do you think is required for future planning for FLY? And since you're answering the question for me and Alicia, maybe specifically future planning for ASL.
Participant:	Well, to be honest, my research topic of the master's dealt with this.
Researcher:	Yah, it's actually similar to mine.
Participant:	So what I had to do was I had to ask master students how they experienced it; what were the strengths and assets, and from that I know Liesel changed a lot. So I think they have changed it already. I mean, one of the difficulties we had was the language barrier, just being prepared for that. I think also a big thing is that we didn't know what to always expect when we were out there. And I know what they've done now is that they have students from previous years who come and talk to you and tell you how to prepare. I don't know if that's happening. And also, there's more instructions within the study guide on how to prepare. So, honestly my issues was just the unpredictability you know. . . Simple things like what stationary do you take? I didn't know things like that, you know. I mean, when I got there, the learners didn't have any stationary. So, thank goodness I could get from my friends, but it's simple things like: What stationary should I take with me? What type of assessments? I mean, the second time I went there, I had examples of the assessments, so that they could see visually what was expected of them. So I had done everything in advance. So simple things like that just so that let us know, you know what, you are going to come across language barriers. You are going to have to have this amount of supplies. This is just so that you can kind of prepare yourself, because the first time I went there I was like thrown into the deep end. I'm like, I was so not prepared for that. So I think that's just about it. Just organising, but I'm a type A, so I like to be organised and I like to know what to expect so. Just that especially with the master's program. You're doing so much, so you just want to know what is required of you so that you can give the best job to the learners at the school. That's about it.

Researcher:	And then the last one. Please reflect on your retrospective experience as an ASL student in the FLY project. What did you enjoy most in the short-term? What gains have benefited you in the long-term? And what did you find challenging? And what did you dislike?
Participant:	For me, actually, this practicum or this ASL program was the best thing that happened to me in my master's. I did it in one year, so I had a lot of work. But this was just so nice, because it just took us out of our comfort zone. It really did. It taught me. . . It actually had a lot to play with my self-esteem and self-confidence and myself as a psychologist, because it taught me a lot and it taught me that I can actually do this outside of the safety of the University of Pretoria, you know. It taught me that I can be flexible and adaptable to changes within my environment and that's what we should actually learn. So that why it was one of my favourite experiences, because you know each minute was different. I really had to continuously adapt so that the learners could understand me and that I could understand them and where they're coming from. So, what else?
Researcher:	What did you dislike?
Participant:	I didn't dislike it, but it was a bit scary being left alone to do it. So no one's watching you. But it's a good thing though. I can't say it's a dislike, but it's a good thing because that's how it is in the real world; you're going to be by yourself. Your lecturers won't be with you in the practice, you know, in your practice you know with the parents and the children holding your hands. So don't say that as a dislike. It was actually. . . I enjoyed that, because it was freedom to . . . it was actually empowering, because you're left to make you own decisions and that I think is a good learning curve for any student. Dislikes . . . let me think of dislikes. I'll be honest with you. At the time, I was a student, I was really broke, ok? And for me, buying all the things I needed to go there with was a bit expensive. I won't lie. It was really hard for me and I mean I had to buy my own stationary. I don't know if you experienced that, I had to buy food and then we also had to buy presents. So we had to buy food for the learners that were there. I think they were provided with lunch and a drink, I'm not sure. I don't really remember perfectly and that was at the time really expensive for me. I just, I was struggling because I wasn't even working 'cause I did mine in one year. So that was a bit hard.
Researcher:	Did you also do the sand play like we're doing? Sand play therapy?
Participant:	No. What is that? (phone ringing) Sorry, can you please pause? (answers phone) It was just expensive, that's all.
Researcher:	Yah, I mentioned about the sand play, but you said you didn't do sand play.
Participant:	What was the sand play about? What are you talking about?
Researcher:	With Prof. Carien.
Participant:	No, we didn't do that. Yah, we didn't do that at all.
Researcher:	Ok. And anything else that you . . . what gains . . . how did it benefit you on the long-term? I mean, you have mentioned some aspects, but is there anything else?
Participant:	Can I be honest? One thing I also liked is that we were so busy here at UP. It was nice to get to know my fellow students. I really liked that part. And also to learn from them. Because we encountered several barriers when we went to, when we did the ASL practicum or project, we

	had to help each other out, so that was really nice, and we learned from each other. And I felt that because we each have our own individual cases here, we don't learn from each other and it's sometimes nice to see how you can do things differently or how you can encounter challenges differently. I thought that was very nice and also it created a kind of, I don't know, a bond between us because of that. So we were so busy here, sometimes you don't even get to know each other and we actually enjoyed that free time together.
Researcher:	Free time, as in you also enjoyed it because it's so hectic here. . .
Participant:	Yah, it is hectic!
Researcher:	But to just kind of. . . I mean in the afternoons you had some free time and in the evenings.
Participant:	Yah, you know there was free time. We also had reflection sessions, which were also very nice, because during the reflection sessions . . . so what we would do, we would engage and interact with the learners and the teachers and the school and afterwards in the afternoons we would have reflection time with Liesel and I thought that was also very nice, because we learned from each other. It was nice to hear that someone else was also experiencing the same challenge as you. And then it was also nice to hear how they were coping with the challenge, what they were actually doing, because then you could apply it to your own practice the next day. So I found the reflection sessions very informative and also just very nice for personal growth. I learned a lot about myself and a lot of . . . and I learned a lot from other people, you know. So yah.
Researcher:	If I can ask, what did you learn about yourself as a therapist? Did it impact the way you are . . . or that you were practicing after your practicum?
Participant:	I think I learned to trust myself more and like I said before, just to have more confidence in myself. Because you are a student, you continuously doubt yourself. It's very hard to have confidence in your abilities as an educational psychologist and you always wonder: Am I doing this correctly? Am I doing this wrong? And you're just . . .not always scared, but always doubting yourself and fearful that you're going to make a mistake because you're dealing with people's lives, so it's a very . . . it's one of those careers where it's very delicate. You can't mess with people. So what I really liked is that I learned about myself there and I learned that I am capable of doing this career. I am capable of being an educational psychologist. I can assess informally if needs be. I can also assess formally as well. So it was just nice that you know, there's a lot of skills that I have and those skills came to light during that project.
Researcher:	You phrased it very well. Anything else that you found challenging or enlightening? You've already given me a lot of information.
Participant:	No, it's ok. I know you need more, because I was also there. (Laughs). Honestly for me it was the money. I was just like, where am I going to get this money from? I think that was it. Honestly, I can't think of anything else that was negative. I really enjoyed it. Is that enough?
Researcher:	It's perfect. Thank you. There were many more plus points than negatives.

Appendix G: Example of thematic analysis process

Question 2: What are the ***strengths*** of the FLY partnership?

Codes	Possible subthemes	Possible themes
Explore alternative assessment/ therapeutic techniques	Experiential learning	Development of future educational psychologists
Learn to work with diversity	Learn to work with diverse clients	
Consolidation/mastering of skills	Developing skills	
Investing in lives/futures/careers	Future-orientated	Construction of future life narratives of the youth
Asset-based narrative approach	Positive narrative approach	
Developing youth holistically	Youth development	
Community empowerment	Community empowerment	Social transformation
Reconciliation	Bridging cultural boundaries	
Contributes to body of knowledge on community engagement	Knowledge shared on scholarly level	Knowledge generation and exchange
Knowledge sharing between partners (i.e. reciprocal learning)	Knowledge shared between partners	
Beneficiaries include students, learners and community	All role players are beneficiaries	Sustainable, active involvement of all beneficiaries
Learners/students/staff involvement	All role players actively involved	
Longevity/sustainability of project	Sustainable involvement	
Exposure to different training context in resource-constraint environment	Unique exposure to different, resource-constraint setting	Unique, practical exposure to cross-cultural community engagement
Exposure to community and cross-cultural engagement	Exposure to cross-cultural community engagement	
Real-world experience	Theory-practice integration	
Bigger picture perspective of role of psychology in SA	Role of psychologists in SA clarified	Increased awareness of psychologists' role as agents for social responsibility
Develops sense of social responsibility in students	Enhanced social responsibility	

Appendix H: Example of initial coding

Question 2: What are the ***strengths*** of the FLY partnership?

Codes	#
• Explore effectiveness of qualitative vs. quantitative assessments • Facilitating a flourishing life • Mutually beneficial • Research in practice	22
• Invest in people's lives • Beneficial to students (experience), learners and community (economic growth) • Contributes to body of knowledge on community engagement	21
• Students exposed to training context outside lecture halls (i.e. theory in practice) • Increases knowledge of social justice • Learn how to function in resource scarce environment	20
• Knowledge sharing between partners • Mutually beneficial to learners (advice) and students (learning how to provide support to majority of South Africans). • Learned about slowing down, paying attention, showing respect and potential challenges in rural areas	19
• Mutually beneficial (students & community) • Provides a practical look at how schools operate • Exposure to alternative settings incl. limitations • Longer-running project = bigger footprint on community • Social justice perspective incl. utilising local resources	18
• Involvement of school staff • Learner participation • Asset-based framework • Ed. psych students' involvement	17
• Different setting from what academic environment offers • Throws you outside your comfort zone • Professional level: Theory meeting practice • Personal level: Bigger picture perspective of psychology in SA context	16
• Sustained positive interaction • Service delivery and upliftment	15

• Mutually beneficial bond/partnership • Students exposed to alternative setting and perspective • Working with prospective community builders and possibly contributing to their futures	
• Practice skills in different context • Make use of post-modern, non-verbal techniques • Become familiar with administration and interpretation of tests	12
• Student exposure to rural schools and community work • Learners gain access to information and resources • Research at school to improve programme • Mutual respect, learning and improvement	13
• Reciprocal learning	14
• Opportunity for learners to get assistance i.t.o. career choice • Opportunity for learners to voice hopes and dreams • Creates a sense of social responsibility in students • Humbling experience • Improves students' skills and adaptability • Creates a strong bond within MEd group	11
• Understanding challenges and positive side of working in a rural setting • School benefitted e.g. career expo and learning programmes • Longevity of the partnership (e.g. building meaningful relationships and meeting changing needs of both parties)	10
• Opportunity for service learning • Opportunity for research and knowledge generation • Platform for community- and cross--cultural engagement • Promotes social justice • Professional services offered to the community • Educational psychology services to gr.9 learners • Change in perspectives (both parties) • Empowerment to identify and reflect on problems and solutions	9
• Mutually beneficial (school and students) • Enables the community by giving them the necessary tools • Improves confidence (students) • Learn to think outside the box in career counselling • Opportunity to apply career narrative approach • Exposure to working in rural environment with limited resources	8

• Development of potential • Relevant, contextual assessment and intervention/support (learners and staff) • Whole school development • Collaboration with other departments at UP • Real-world experience for students	7
• Learning opportunity to work with cultural diversity • Increased flexibility in style/method/techniques • Logistics and clear systems • Support and guidance from lecturer • Relationship building with fellow students	6
• Identifying and mobilising assets and fostering resilience • Active involvement of learners • Multicultural, postmodern and positive psychology perspective • Focus on narratives and meaning-making • Developing youth emotionally, socially and scholastically • Enhance self-exploration • Career guidance • Empower communities • Development of future psychologists • Theory-practice integration	5
• Consolidation and mastering of skills • Safe environment • Exposure to real challenges	3
• Theory-practice integration • Assessment and interventions with diverse learners • Platform for social justice • Learn to think outside the box • Increased awareness of South African reality and social responsibility • Encourages future community engagement	4
• Exposure to diversity in SA context i.t.o language, culture and race • Learn to be adaptable and flexible which translates into therapy • Social justice approach • Students' roles as facilitators/mediators	2
• Unique exposure for students • Contribution to community involvement and transformation	1

• Promotes relationships between people from different cultural and social environments • Learners benefit from reflecting on alternative careers and lifestyles • Reconciliation against the backdrop of our country's history and Apartheid • Promotes positive attitudes	

Appendix I: Example of cross-cohort analysis

Subtheme 2.1: Prolonged engagement and increased collaboration is needed to strengthen the partnership.			
Cohort	**Part.**	**Code**	**Q**
2007	3	• Limited interaction between parties affect sustainability	3
	2	• Collaboration between UP (various departments) and the partner-school	1
		• Long time	1
	1	• On-going for several years • Sustainable project i.t.o. collaboration	1
		• Contribution to community involvement and transformation	2
		• Limited teacher-involvement	3
		• Learned that it takes a few committed people to run a successful, sustainable project • Realised that I enjoy community engagement	5
		• International initiatives • More sustainable ethnographic study (being in the milieu and culture for a longer period of time) to contribute to project/research e.g. teaching student, MEd Psych student or counsellor doing for a year. This will bring unique perspective on the whole system, improve communication and integration with the school • Follow up with learners who were part of the ASL program (were expectations i.t.o career and life met?)	4
2008	4	• Encourages future community engagement	2
		• More time at practicum site (1st & 2nd year of Masters)	4
2009	5	• On-going collaboration with role players	1
	8	• On-going	1
		• Constant communication between partners • Tap into the network to run other projects	4
	9	• Platform for community- and cross--cultural engagement	2
		• Continuous funding	3
		• Involvement of more researchers and students • Funding to continue with the partnership	4
		• Experience i.t.o community engagement, cross-cultural competence and rural school setting	5
	7	• Collaboration with other departments at UP	2

		• Linking with other university departments to improve community development	4
2010	14	• Longitudinal	1
		• Sustainability project e.g. vegetable garden	4
	10	• Longevity of the partnership (e.g. building meaningful relationships and meeting changing needs of both parties)	2
		• Limited impact due to short visits • Lack of continuity i.t.o. role players	3
		• Partnering with additional role players that can help learners with practical aspects of connecting to careers and studying institutions	4
		• Increased awareness of future involvement in community programmes	5
	13	• Long-term partnership between UP and schools in Mpumulanga	1
		• Longer, more committed engagement	4
		• Short engagement wasn't meaningful	5
	12	• Part of a longitudinal research project	1
		• FLY Project should be in 1st and 2nd year of Masters	
	11	• No follow-ups with students to determine progress and provide further assistance	3
		• Follow-up visits in 2nd year Masters	4
2011	16	• Establish connections with other professionals that can assist i.t.o. remedial assistance, tutoring, infrastructure etc. at the school	4
	18	• Long-term project	1
		• Infrastructure to continue cycle of development when project ends	4
		• Longer-running project = bigger footprint on community	2
		• Awakened awareness of and confirmed future involvement in community development projects	5
		• Not knowing what happens in learners' futures (LT)	
	15	• Sustained positive interaction	2
		• Sustainability can't be guaranteed	3
		• Sustainable engineering	4
2012	19	• Insufficient engagement with teachers for follow-through	3
		• Collaborate more closely with teachers	4
		• Limited teacher involvement	5
		• Follow-up studies on learners post-school	4

2013	21	• More time (longer visit or third visit) to facilitate follow-through of skills.	4
		• Stimulates thinking on future community engagement involvement (LT)	5
	20	• Students should be involved for a prolonged period of time	4

Appendix J: Examples of member checking

Example 1:

Re: FLY
1 message

Mon, 9 May 2016 at 18:37

To: Ina-Mari <inamari.dutoit@gmail.com>

Hi Ina

My apologies for the late response again.

FLY is a "once-off" experience if I may call it like that, its okay because it gives students a feel of what is like working in resource scarce communities. However, for students to be involved for a prolonged period would possibly mean their experience is expanded and therefore gets them ready for the work to be done in rural communities. As much we would all want to work in areas that has resources and everything available the truth is we do not all end up there. Therefore, a prolonged experience would give students an opportunity to be ready for the challenges experienced in rural areas.

Students may be involved during at least 2 school holidays (maybe June and September) in order for them to be equipped with the skills of working rural communities.

I hope this is sufficient, you can let me know if you need more clarification. I'll respond quickly this time :-)

Example 2:

Wed, 27 Apr 2016 at 12:37

To: Ina-Mari du Toit <inamari.dutoit@gmail.com>

Ina-Mari,

My feedback:

- You experienced the partnership to be mutually beneficial to both students, learners and the larger community.
- *Yes, I am of the opinion that the partnership holds value for all participating stakeholders.*

- You feel that the research done as part of the partnership contributes to the body of knowledge on community engagement and prepare students to be socially responsible citizens.
- *Yes, I think participating in service learning broadens the worldview of students and it stimulates a homegrown understanding of active citizenship and collaboration possibilities within our country.*

- Based on your experience as academic service-learning student, you feel that the partnership can be improved on by prolonged engagement with the learners at the rural school in order to ensure sustainability in terms of skills development.
- *Yes, prolonged engagement can definitely supplement current development opportunities and accelerate growth of all role players. In addition, the partnership can be expanded by incorporating additional systems within the community, e.g activities encouraging parent involvement.*

Kind regards,