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Full title:

Community-Based Learning and critical community psychology practice: conducive and corrosive aspects

Keywords:

Community-Based Learning; critical community psychology practice; power; cultural voyeurism

Abstract:

Community-Based Learning (CBL) has been more recently introduced into some psychology programmes in the UK than in the USA, where it has existed for a number of decades in the form of 'service learning'. CBL holds promise as a means of promoting and developing critical community psychology practice, but there are risks involved in its uncritical adoption in the psychology curriculum. If associated power dynamics are not considered, CBL has the capacity to serve neoliberal interests and perpetuate, rather than challenge, oppressive social relations.

This article examines ways in which CBL can be both conducive and corrosive to critical community psychology practice. Drawing on interdisciplinary literature, it explores ways in which students participating in CBL can be vulnerable to exploitation – both as victims and perpetrators – through collusion and cultural voyeurism.

Consideration is given to ways of resisting institutional and other pressures to comply uncritically with the demands of the 'employability agenda'. These include the importance of facilitated reflective processes in associated modules, to consider aspects of the interactions of people and systems. The article concludes that whilst CBL is inherently risky and involves discomfort for students, this enables development of a more informed consciousness where truly participatory work evolves towards greater social justice.

Introduction

Community-Based Learning (CBL) or, in the USA, 'service learning', is the term used to describe a form of work placement that provides experiential learning which extends beyond the classroom. According to Hatcher and Bringle (1997) CBL is:

“the type of experiential education in which students participate in service in the community and reflect on their involvement in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content and of the discipline and its relationship to social needs and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility” (p.1)

Social Justice is a central tenet of community psychology (Kagan, 2015). An essential part of CBL, when adopted as part of a community psychology curriculum, is the sensitisation of the student to the oppressive nature of many current social arrangements, and the cultivation of anti-oppressive practice with a commitment to collaborative partnership-working. CBL could therefore be a key vehicle for promoting and developing critical community psychology practice (Mitchell, 2008).

In the UK, the inclusion of student placements in undergraduate programmes is generally encouraged – at least at a rhetorical level. The imperatives of the employability agenda in the UK higher education sector have grown in the past decade and there is both political and institutional pressure to demonstrate the vocational relevance of degree programmes as well as their effectiveness in equipping students for graduate employment (Billett, 2009; Reid, Dahlgren, Petocz & Dahlgren, 2008; Wilton, 2012). Whilst some form of mandatory work placement or practice placement is common in other people-focused disciplines (such as education, counselling, social work, health and social care professions), at an undergraduate level psychology has traditionally avoided this. As a result, the links between psychology and employability are not always evident (Akhurst, 2005). In addition, the absence of community psychology and the related CBL from the mainstream undergraduate psychology curriculum could be viewed as further indications of the discipline's conservative, inward-looking and 'apolitical' nature (Fox, Prilleltensky & Austin, 2009).

Despite this, students are often drawn to the study of psychology because of a desire to work with and help people. Goedeke and Gibson (2011) explored new undergraduate students' beliefs about the discipline and study of psychology and expectations of what they would learn in the programme. Results reveal students' contradictory ideas about psychology, sometimes describing it as a science and at other times as an extension of everyday knowledge. Students appear to believe that undergraduate psychology involves personal and experiential learning and teaches practical skills to help people; also expressing a need for skills to facilitate their career prospects and emphasising practitioner-related activities rather than theoretical knowledge.

In contrast to these expectations, UK undergraduate psychology currently caters for the needs of a minority. Programmes holding British Psychological Society (BPS) recognition explicitly prepare students to pursue Chartered Psychologist status and yet only a minority of graduates – up to a fifth – choose this career direction (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2015; Lantz & Reddy, 2010). Many more – nearly half – go on to work in ‘miscellaneous’ roles in social welfare, housing and community work (Trapp & Akhurst, 2011). Such roles, often found in the ‘third sector’ (non-governmental organisations, charities and social enterprises), do not require Chartered status, but previous CBL would undoubtedly be of value to these workers.

Programmes that include or are influenced by community psychology usually do include work placements and these provide experiences of working in communities that are often deprived and impoverished. On the face of it community psychology appears to have a distinct advantage in that it addresses the employability agenda and promises to bridge the gap between ‘ivory tower’ psychology and the real world. CBL is therefore well-placed to enrich the curriculum as well as enhance students’ learning experiences and employability.

Neoliberalism and the employability agenda

Nevertheless, there may be valid reasons to resist institutional pressure to develop employability skills in students. As Cowden (2010) points out, UK Higher Education operates as a market-driven model dominated by a managerial audit culture. Learning is redefined as a ‘product’ or at best an ‘experience’, albeit one that is subject to enforced standardisation. A key feature of this product is ‘employability’ – an ingredient supposedly conferred on the student through a successful programme of study. Whilst employability may be viewed as a desirable feature of an academic programme, Morley and Dunstan (2013) contend that neoliberal values erode a professional identity and, instead, encourage procedural actions that serve managerial goals. In such a context there is a danger that student work placements can be appropriated as part of the wider neoliberal enterprise of passive ‘knowledge transfer’ and ‘credentialism’ (Brown, 2001), thereby serving as a vehicle for top-down (de-)skilling and training of the future workforce. Students can play their part in this relationship willingly and may undertake degree programmes less for the academic fulfilment they offer and more for their “...instrumental, ‘sheepskin’ effects in job hunting.” (Brown, 2001, p.19). In this sense, work placement experiences may threaten the student’s autonomy by encouraging procedural working.

In such a market-driven environment the student is positioned as a consumer and academics are encouraged, induced or even coerced into adopting the complementary and collusive role of retailer. Student placements are most commonly found on Business and Management programmes (Dunworth & Goldman, 2014) and much research supporting the usefulness of student work placements has relied on a business and management perspective, which views the role of placement as being to prepare workers for corporate life, ideally in management

positions (Wilton, 2012). This perspective welcomes greater involvement by employers in higher education, with employability skills given explicit prominence in the curriculum, and students are deemed to gain a competitive edge in the graduate job market: everyone is a winner (Ogilvie & Homan, 2012). The placement provider (typically referred to as 'the employer') performs the role of converting the student into a proto-employee. Enhanced employability skills gained via this process are depicted as distinctive features of the educational product that set the programme and/or university apart from its competitors.

In contrast, the role of universities – and of placement learning – in performing some of the work traditionally undertaken by employers in preparing students for the workplace is highly contentious (Hesketh, 2000; Stewart & Knowles, 1999; Wilton, 2012). The role of corporate capitalism in influencing the kinds of learning regarded as legitimate and proper has thus been subject to critique (Lester & Costley, 2010; Rhodes & Garrick, 2003).

Student placements and CBL can be considered to be contributing to forms of 'precariat' (Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2016; Standing, 2011): a class of workers who live a precarious existence due to their lack of labour stability, and who are typically employed on temporary, insecure contracts ('zero hours' contracts, for example). In addition to the precarity of their labour status, this class of workers increasingly engages in 'work for labour', that is to say that they must study, acquire skills and work without payment in order to secure or retain paid employment (Frase, 2013). In their role of encouraging 'employability', internships, student placements and CBL, universities thus become complicit in this type of exploitation.

The dominant corporate view of the student placement as being one of the principal means to enhance employability creates tensions when confronted with the collaborative values of community psychology: invoking Freire's (1970) distinction between 'banking education' (an information transfer which entails filling the student with 'detached contents') and 'problem-solving education' (in which participants become co-learners through dialogue, not 'knowledge transfer'). 'Higher vocational education' might thus seem antithetical to higher education (i.e. the privileging of the workplace over learning *per se*), but Billett (2009) argues that work-integrated learning and higher education are reconcilable, since the capacity for professional work involves "the exercise of critical facilities within domains of occupational practice" (p.828).

This article is therefore written in order to consider the benefits of and the tensions inherent in CBL. Drawing on a number of years' experience of facilitating such student engagement in 'the community', the authors consider the counterbalancing captured in the profit and loss discourse of the marketplace and business transactions: does CBL represent an asset or a liability, or in the words of the title, which aspects are conducive to learning, and which might be viewed as corrosive to best practice in community psychology?

Benefits of CBL

Despite the above objections to addressing the employability agenda, the benefits of undertaking work placements as part of a university programme are widely recognised (for example Mitchell, 2008). Indeed, research abounds on the putative benefits for students of undertaking some kind of placement or work-based learning. These include: increased grades (Conway, Amel & Gerwien, 2009; Schmidt, Shumfow & Kackar, 2007); increased motivation (Conway *et al.*, 2009); and – on a faintly sinister level – reduction in ‘behaviour problems’ (Schmidt *et al.*, 2007). Murakami, Murray, Sims and Chedzey (2009) acknowledge that both those who have experienced placements and the staff who organise them hold positive views of their impact on students’ learning. Teamwork, collaborative learning and the experience of holding responsibility are of particular importance for student learning on placement (Crebert, Bates, Bell & Cragolini, 2004). Additionally, various studies have concluded that the experience of completing a placement enhances students’ interpersonal skills (Larson, Walker & Pearce, 2005; Smith, Davis & Bhomik, 2010; Terry, 2008) and awareness of social issues (Dawes & Larson, 2011).

Furthermore, Chapdelaine and Chapman (1999) argue that a community-based project is an effective way for students to learn about methodology, gain research experience and contribute to society. Perry and Katula (2001) also note how experiential learning, particularly when it is based in the community, may be a powerful means to develop students’ awareness of their responsibilities as citizens. A ‘real world’ placement context raises students’ awareness of issues (social, political, economic, and historical) that they may otherwise choose to avoid or manage to ignore. In addition, the lived reality of the community members with whom they interact leads to students needing to make sense of their experiences through considering the forces at play in that context (Mitchell, 2008).

With more specific reference to psychology, Reddy and Moores (2006) found that psychology undergraduates who completed a placement year achieved higher marks in their final year compared to those who undertook no placement, were rated more favourably in self-management and research skills and were more employable (within six months of graduation such students had a higher rate of employment and a higher average salary). Knight and Yorke (2003), however, argue that employability is best enhanced through integration into the curriculum rather than being ‘bolted on’ in an extra-curricular way.

To summarise the key benefits of CBL: it enhances the quality of learning and teaching within and beyond the related modules of an academic programme, as well as supporting students’ desires to become involved in communities and to make some sort of ‘difference’ through their engagement (Akhurst & Mitchell, 2012).

Tensions and challenges in CBL

Whilst the above benefits are regularly cited in support of student placements, less attention has been paid to the challenges involved and to the potential, if unintended, for negative consequences. For example, rather limited attention has been paid to the propensity of CBL to mirror and replicate existing power structures and inequalities routinely found in the workplace, academic institutions and wider society (Mitchell, 2008). Students may 'buy into' the dominant mode of amelioration, rather than considering more transformative actions (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). Whilst CBL is generally intended to empower students, there are also ways in which it can lead to their exploitation and tacitly encourage them to maintain the status quo. This may result in pressuring the student to comply with procedural or even reactionary ways of working – and so undermining the very values and learning that CBL is intended to promote.

In their systematic review of the literature on professional identity development Trede, Macklin and Bridges (2012) argue that the research base for understanding the development of professional identity (and the role of universities in this) is not strong. There is an assumption that a strong professional identity is something to which students should aspire. Combined with a lack of clarity about the professional identity of a psychologist (let alone a community psychologist), there seems limited insight into what CBL might be intended to develop, or recognition of when it has been achieved.

a) Taking risks versus playing it safe

Part of the reason for the double-edged nature of CBL is that the learning it offers is, in contrast to 'banking education' (Freire, 1970), risky in all sorts of ways. One of the key features of CBL is its status as a kind of 'problem-based learning': a type of learning experience that is characterised by its uncertain and open-ended nature and thus laden with risks (Barrett & Moore, 2011). In this tentative and equivocal arena, Barrett (2006) argues that we cannot pass directly from an old state to a new state: we enter a transitory phase or 'liminal space'. Entry to this space does not guarantee progressive learning: it is a doorway that might lead to transformation or, if the student's discomfort is too great, it may lead to stagnation or even regression (Coleman, Collings & McDonald, 1999; Hughes, 2013).

Within this contested space, CBL occupies a curious position: on the one hand it promises an individualised and radical learning experience that is at odds with the notion of a neoliberal standardised 'product' which can be purchased like any other commodity, yet on the other hand it fits neatly into the neoliberal framework of equipping the student with 'tools' that enhance employability. In this sense, there is potential for CBL to become a collusive rather than an empowering force, especially in view of the risk and discomfort faced by students who occupy the 'liminal space'.

In a CBL context the risks are not only faced by the student, but also the host community organisation, the university, as well as the staff and service users in the community setting. As a worker, the student is often untested and may be error-prone as a result of inexperience. Doing the 'wrong thing' could harm the interests of service users as well as the reputation of both the community organisation and the university. As such, the placement organisation may immediately become a site of tension. Even the student's fear of doing the wrong thing may lead to 'playing it safe' and doing as instructed rather than daring to question practices. Thus the student is invited to take risks but is tacitly instructed to maintain the status quo in the workplace and the academy. At the same time, as universities and workplaces encourage students to develop 'reflective artistry' (Munro, 2010) and become autonomous learners, greater emphasis is placed on the student's "...ability to follow rules and procedures," (Wilson, 2013, p.169). Clearly there can be dissonance and conflict between the ideals of community psychology and the student's experience in CBL (Hughes, 2013; Mackay & Woodward, 2010).

b) The balance of power

This inherent riskiness of CBL runs counter to institutional pressures to control or eradicate risk and ensure consistency or quality control in the educational 'product'. Managerial concerns invariably centre on health and safety issues, largely because they are visible and amenable to audit and control. Pedagogical concerns might, instead, be less obviously visible as threats to the student's effective learning and development.

Although various benefits of completing a placement have been outlined, there is still limited understanding of what makes for a high quality and valid learning experience for the student (Ogilvie & Homan, 2012). Brennan and Little (1996) emphasise the importance of the student receiving plentiful and individualised support in their placement environment (something which, from a managerial perspective, is assumed to take care of itself). This is set in an ideological context of placements appearing to offer a shortcut to addressing the employability agenda and thus offering something for nothing in resourcing terms. However, the importance of CBL being underpinned by carefully facilitated reflective experiences (Akhurst & Mitchell, 2012) means that it can be much more resource-intensive than managers would like to concede.

Ogilvie and Homan (2012) also highlight the way in which student learning takes place via individual workplaces and students are left to construct meaning. Such learning is far less influenced by tutor input and far more influenced by working practices, communication practices, and social and group norms in the placement setting. Although this can be liberating and empowering for students becoming more independent learners, it also leaves them vulnerable to various forms of exploitation.

As suggested earlier, institutionally CBL can be seen as a cheap option, a shortcut to addressing the employability agenda while avoiding resource investment (the managerial drive to do more with less). There are important considerations related to institutional commitment to this kind of learning, and Gelmon, Sherman, Gaudet, Mitchell and Trotter (2004) highlight the importance of institutional support. Mitchell and Rautenbach (2005) caution against programmes that benefit mainly university students, where the community partners are not accorded the same power as university tutors.

The work is often devolved to individual module directors or placement managers who do not necessarily have the capacity or time to provide the levels of supervision of practice needed to enable students to learn well from their experiences. Also, the under-emphasised need to build and sustain relationships with community partners over time (building trust, providing consistency, managing expectations) can go unmet, leading to unsatisfying and unsustainable relationships.

In hierarchical terms, it is not uncommon for the University to exploit the placement organisation which can, in turn, exploit the student when they are on placement. An example is of a lifeskills programme offered by students in partnership with a teacher-led organisation. The students are accommodated by the partner organisation in order to complete their coursework requirements (promoting the University's desire to illustrate 'community engagement'). In some of the schools, the teachers appeared not to have had an understanding of the students' constructions of their goals. The teachers were overheard expressing views that the students' ideas should not be taken seriously by the school pupils, since they were 'merely students' and the teachers' support for their involvement was mainly to do with relief from class interactions, giving them some 'free time'.

Additionally, the student might exploit the service user and community in which they work. Hence those nearer to the bottom of the hierarchy shoulder a disproportionate share of the costs, in inverse relation to the rewards. As with most hierarchical relationships, the rewards are channelled upwards while the costs are channelled downwards (a similar set of power relations can also be observed in mainstream psychological research where 'subjects' traditionally enjoy no or very little share of the rewards). Whilst this gives some indication of how students can be exploited as well as exploit others, a hierarchy fails to capture the dynamic and reciprocal nature of the power-saturated relations involved in CBL (Mitchell, 2008).

The student can thus enter into a CBL placement with the intention of 'making a difference' and may yet end up exploiting and oppressing those they have come to 'liberate'. In their discussion of similar issues affecting social work students, Sakamoto and Pitner (2005) describe this phenomenon as the 'teacher/student trap', a relationship that replicates the inequalities the students experience with their university tutors and placement supervisors, whereby power differentials are preserved rather than challenged. Helping professions typically adopt a 'top down'

approach according to which assistance, knowledge and expertise are dispensed from above: from the tutor to the student and from the practitioner to the service user. In this context, earnest attempts to develop anti-oppressive practice can unwittingly lead to further oppression: “instead of moving toward social justice and partnership, the teacher/student trap has a way of forcing social workers to perpetuate and re-inscribe power differentials and social injustice” (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005, p.439).

The student might therefore be seduced into modelling practice that privileges the expert and oppresses the service user. Both in the workplace and the academy, neoliberal managerialism privileges the ‘expert’ in a hierarchical relationship (Morley & Dunstan, 2013), undermining collaborative practice with service users. The focus is on the student’s ability to follow rules and procedures, not working in partnerships. This tendency to comply with the tacit rules of the workplace and the explicit rules of academic assessment is especially likely if students are actively encouraged to pursue ‘expert’ status. This is exactly the mainstream psychology message, in the sense that the student is working towards a degree (a key badge of expertise) and the added lure of ‘graduate basis for chartership’ status. Not only are students subject to power being wielded above them in the hierarchy, they are also acculturated into the practice of wielding that power over those located beneath them in that hierarchy. Clearly, this contrasts with community psychology principles that strive toward reducing inequalities (Kagan, 2015). Prilleltensky (2008) remarks: “not enough attention has been paid to the potential dual identity of being an oppressor and an oppressed person at the same time.” (p.118). A recurring theme that has emerged in the authors’ work with students undertaking CBL is that of their ambivalent experiences of acceptance by their fellow workers while on placement. Students often provide accounts of their pleasure and relief at being granted membership of the group following an awkward period of being viewed as a newcomer or ‘outsider’. Yet, on reflection, they express discomfort or even shame at some of their own behaviours as a new in-group member, such as laughing along with dubious ‘in jokes’ or failing to challenge oppressive actions by others assertively. For some, merely becoming viewed by others as a ‘worker’ rather than ‘just a student’ led them to feel that they were no longer on placement to learn but to ‘police’ and ‘discipline’ the service users they had come to help.

Similarly, Mullaly (2002) argues that “the process of becoming an oppressor is hidden from the person” (p.208), highlighting the need for enhanced self awareness and critical reflection. Proctor (2008), a Clinical Psychologist, warns that the increasing emphasis on ‘professionalisation’ serves to protect the expert status of practitioners but also widens the gap between the practitioner and client, as well as leading to rule-bound rather than ethical practice.

At the same time that students are faced with the risks of CBL, their vulnerability as learners coupled with their desire to achieve membership of a professional group with the appropriate identity can be at odds with the anti-oppressive values of

community psychology. This may be especially so given the demands of formal assessment and the demands and expectations of the placement setting. In this risky liminal space, students may opt to conform as this may seem a surer way to support their desire to achieve expert status, even though this can lead to the kind of insidious oppression and exploitation that can be so corrosive to community practice (Prilleltensky, 2008).

c) Altruism or voyeurism?

If not adequately prepared for CBL, students may undertake placements with naïve expectations about helping or ‘rescuing’ socially excluded individuals and/or communities. The student’s best intentions may thus further accelerate towards oppression. ‘Cultural voyeurism’ describes a combination of curiosity or fascination with difference and a naïve desire to ‘help’ or ‘rescue’ people who live in deprived communities (and the associated assuaging of guilt). In the words of Durr and Jaffe (2002) it: “...involves the commodification of urban deprivation” (p.120). ‘Cultural voyeurism’ is a form of gratification akin to ‘poverty porn’, ‘slum tourism’, ‘ghettourism’ (the desire to view extreme poverty and/or violence) or ‘voluntourism’ (contributing to welfare projects).

Although this phenomenon is not exclusive to CBL, it can serve to widen the gap between the student and the community in which they are working. In the context of tourism in Rio de Janeiro, for example, Williams (2008) describes the “charitable, if not voyeuristic desire to ‘observe’ and ‘help’ disadvantaged communities” (p.485). In a description of *favela* (Brazilian slum) tours, there appear to be some parallels:

“There are conflicting discussions about the ethics ... The suggestions that they are like an exoticising ‘safari’ around a kind of ‘zoo’, with commentaries in languages the residents do not understand, and that the profits go into organisers’ pockets rather than being invested in *favela* projects ...” (Williams, 2008, p.486). Fairtlough, Bernard, Fletcher and Ahmet (2013) assert that critical perspectives must permeate the curriculum to combat such oppressive tendencies.

There are disturbing similarities between such tourism activities and CBL. It is all too easy for students to slip into the mode of spectator, visiting communities as if on safari, talking in academic language that excludes the community members (whilst simultaneously asserting and flattering the student’s nascent expert status), with ‘profits’ flooding out of the community in the form of the student’s learning or enhanced employability skills. From a community psychology perspective, clearly these attitudes are deeply problematic, and raise the question of the sustainability of such practices (Kagan, 2015), given the one-sided gains made.

It may be all too easy for the student to become fixated on their own development and overlook the possibility that community members – like *favela* inhabitants – have no wish to be mere objects of fascination. As Williams (2008) points out, they: “...want to be recognised as human beings with feelings and opinions, rather than

objects of research” (p.496). This highlights the imperative for better constructed community partnerships, where partners are accorded far greater influence (Akhurst & Mitchell, 2012).

Despite the potential for such voyeuristic tendencies, the naïve gaze of the student might serve to restore community members’ interest in activities and realities that have become commonplace to them. This realisation in community members that the mundane is exotic to an outsider may open up possibilities for change: “Slum tourism ... may also provide openings for more nuanced, alternative or unusual representations” (Durr & Jaffe, 2012, p.119). Such change and alternative representations need to be brought about via shared discourse, rather than imposed by an outside ‘rescuer’ or ‘ghettourist’.

Mitchell (2008) also raises the challenge of the ways in which students construct community members’ experiences of hardship and deprivation. Whilst exposure to experiences of social exclusion (e.g. homelessness) might be very emotionally upsetting for some students, and may lead to better empathy, most students will not have had similar life experiences. This highlights the need for appropriate supervision and debriefing, and to work towards the translation of such learning into solidarity, potentially enhancing advocacy work for social change to combat potential oppression. Activities that facilitate sustained critical reflection are therefore centrally important to transform such learning from experiences.

Conclusion:

As we have seen, the community-based learning ‘journey’ requires careful management and diligent supervision in order to prevent negative, damaging or reactionary outcomes for its participants. CBL is vital for developing awareness, practice skills and anti-oppressive practice; but needs scrupulous ongoing management and the supporting surround of a curriculum permeated by criticality to avoid existing power relations being re-inscribed and perpetuated. In the absence of additional resources to support this, what strategies are available to make it worthwhile?

Opportunities for critical reflection that are embedded in associated modules are a vital means for the student to make sense of their experiences on placement (Bay & McFarlane, 2011). It unsettles ‘taken-for-granted’ thinking and accepted arrangements and practices as well as allowing students to explore and reconcile their sense of dissonance and disequilibrium as they occupy the liminal space. However, the development of this critically reflective faculty is not an inevitable consequence of CBL.

Professions face the challenge of procedural versus critically reflective working, and this is especially so as community psychology gains ground in UK psychology. The potentially risky and unpredictable qualities exhibited by CBL are both an asset and

a challenge; however, as in the case of promoting problem-based learning, we believe these are necessary in order for the desired learning to take place.

CBL is conducive to supporting learning in community psychology through enabling the development of anti-oppressive community practice: but it also has the potential to be corrosive by supporting neoliberal and managerial interests through its promotion of the employability agenda. In this sense CBL places divergent pressures on the student: to challenge orthodoxy and yet comply and perpetuate it. CBL has potential value for all those involved; but in the absence of any identifiable coherent theoretical basis it is exposed to pragmatic and institutional demands that threaten to make it complicit with neoliberal agendas of simultaneously skilling and de-skilling graduate workers. CBL can, for example, help to skill graduates as servile managers yet deskill them as autonomous professionals; maintaining the status quo: it might position problems of inequality as individual deficits or disorders and thus pathologise the individual; and deliver an educational 'product' demanded by 'consumers', including students and employers.

It is not easy to see how these tensions can be resolved. Perhaps they should not: by bringing psychology to life CBL also highlights tensions inherent within the discipline (and the ethical and moral dilemmas that these entail in practice). As Sakamoto and Pitner (2005) argue, the discomfort that arises from such tension is a necessary part of the transformative learning process that CBL is intended to bring about. As we have illustrated, students have gained insights through CBL of the unequal rewards involved, they have developed critical awareness of their own capacity to oppress, and according to their own accounts their discomfort has been a necessary spur to action. A key factor in nurturing this developing awareness has been the provision of adequate supervision, debriefing and dialogue between all partners: 'problem-solving' and not 'banking' education (Freire, 1970).

Australian aboriginal social worker Lilla Watson is reported as saying: "If you've come to help me you're wasting your time. But if you've come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together" (in Stringer, 1996, p. 148). CBL that is embedded within a critical community psychology programme thus needs to be based on a foundation of authentic partnerships for all involved, to enable students to develop a more informed consciousness based on an ethic of care, where truly participatory work evolves towards greater social justice.

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