

# PERCEPTIONS OF COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES IN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY SERVICE LEARNING ENGAGEMENTS

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# INTRODUCTION

# BACKGROUND

## Service learning

“An educational approach involving curriculum-based, credit-bearing learning experiences in which students (a) participate in contextualised, well-structured and organised **service activities** aimed at addressing identified **service needs** in a **community**, and (b) **reflect** on the service experiences in order to gain a deeper understanding of the linkage between **curriculum content** and community dynamics, as well as achieve **personal growth** and a sense of **social responsibility**. It requires a **collaborative partnership** context that enhances mutual, reciprocal teaching and learning among all members of the partnership (lecturers and students, members of the communities and representatives of the service sector)” (University of the Free State 2006:9–10).

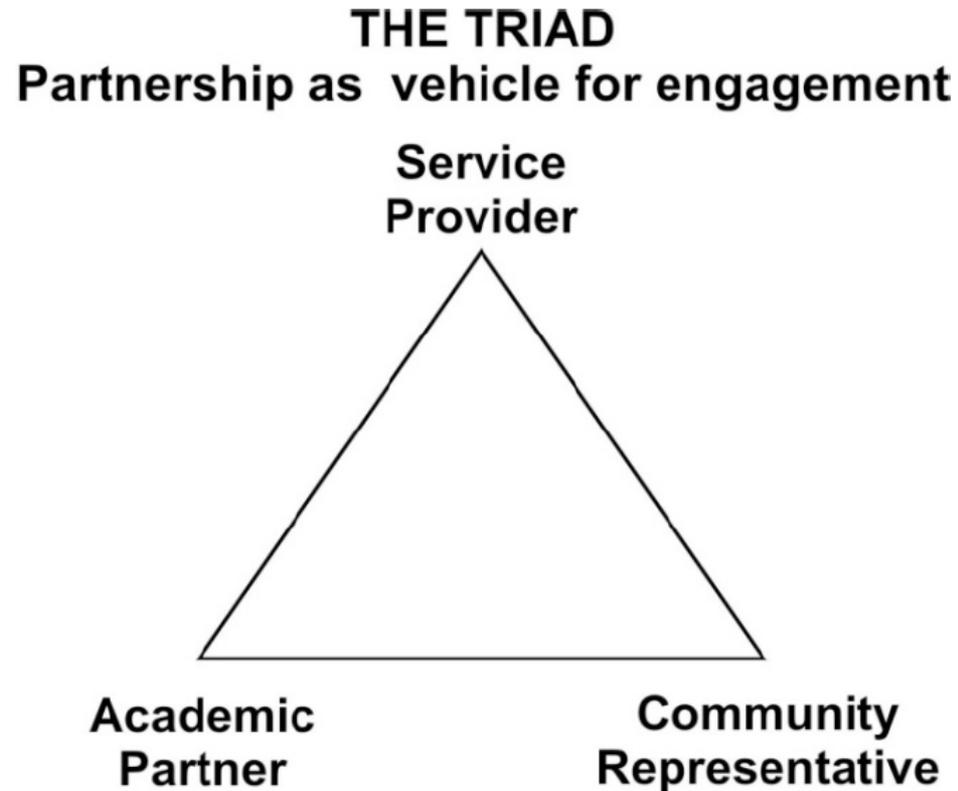
# 1994: Education White Paper 3

*(A Programme for Higher Education Transformation)*

Higher education institutions are called upon to demonstrate social responsibility...and their **COMMITMENT TO THE COMMON GOOD** by making available expertise and infrastructure for community service programmes...

A major goal of higher education is to promote and develop the **SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY** and awareness among students of the role of higher education in social and economic development...

NB feature of service learning in South Africa:



(Lazarus 2001 in Stanton & Erasmus 2013, p. 78)

# BACKGROUND

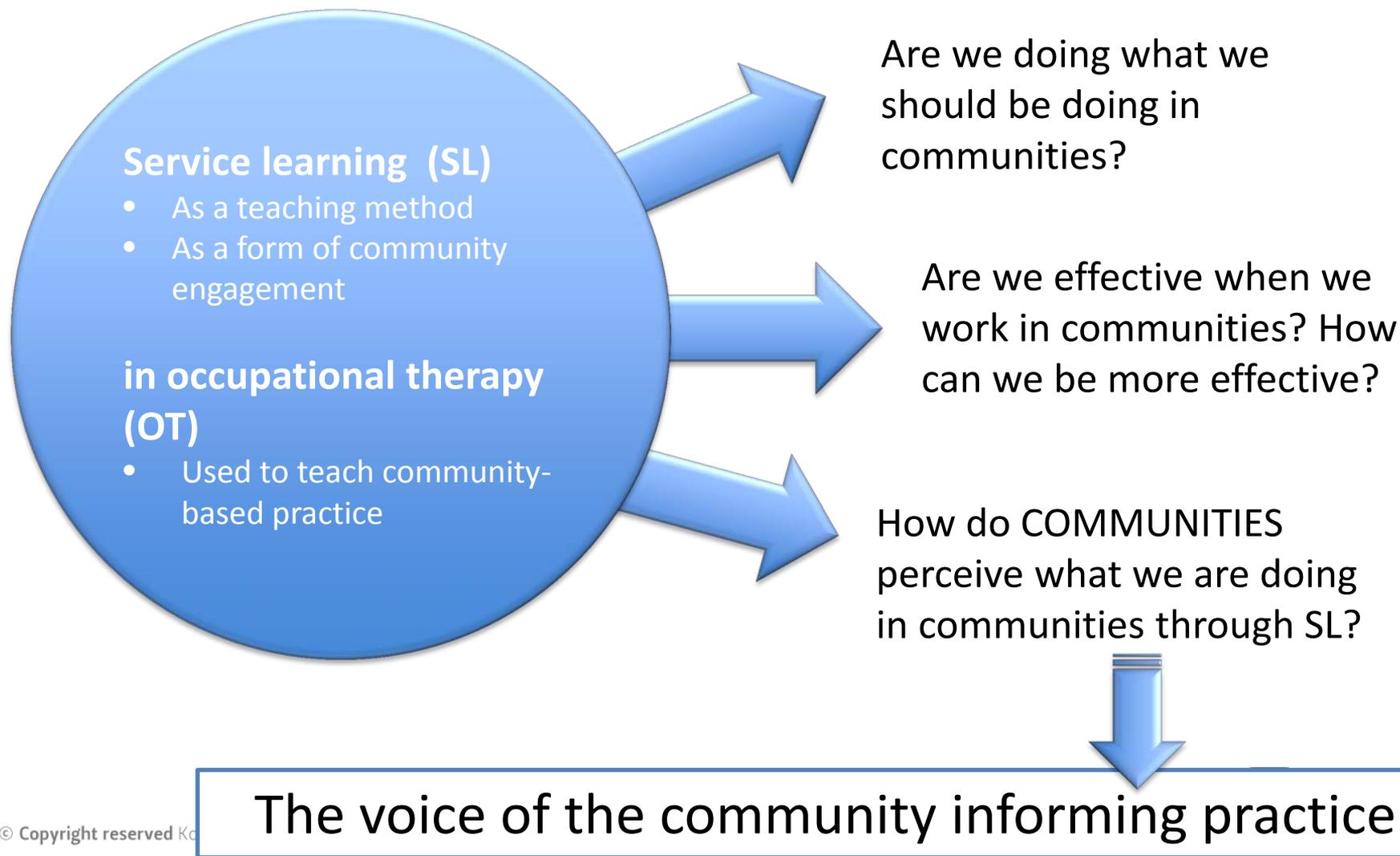
## Research on service learning and communities (in occupational therapy)

- Communities are generally **satisfied** with students and their work
- Communities experience student services as **helpful**
- **Benefits** drawn from student involvement outweigh the costs
- **Partnerships** between the community and the university is facilitated through service learning projects
- **Challenges:** difficulties with student schedules, lack of communication between stakeholders, short-term vs. long-term projects, not understanding the purpose of service activities

*Studies often based on course evaluations (not formalised research), sometimes based on perceptions of students and lecturers, lack methodological rigour and theoretical grounding*

(Reeb & Folger 2013, Bringle & Steinberg 2010, Nduna 2007, Van Schalkwyk & Erasmus 2011, Schindler 2014)

# MOTIVATION FOR STUDY



# COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE

A member of the community where services are rendered, who by appointment of the community, the community organisation or otherwise, acts as a 'gatekeeper' to the particular community and a collaborator with the university, and represents the community members who are recipients of the services.

# RESEARCH AIMS

To describe the perceptions of community representatives regarding enabling occupation through service learning in communities, as well as the barriers and facilitating factors to this process, at a South African university.

- To describe the perceptions of community representatives regarding enabling occupation through service learning.
- To describe community representatives' perceptions regarding barriers to enabling occupation in occupational therapy service learning engagements.
- To describe community representatives' perceptions regarding facilitating factors to enabling occupation in occupational therapy service learning engagements.

# METHODOLOGY

# METHODOLOGY

- Descriptive, qualitative study design
- Semi-structured interviews with 8 community representatives (7 different sites)
- Interviews transcribed
- Inductive, systematic content analysis
- Codes → categories → themes
- Participant verification of interpreted results

# TRUSTWORTHINESS

## CREDIBILITY

- Investigator triangulation
- Participant verification

## TRANSFERABILITY

- Thick, rich descriptions
- Data saturation

## DEPENDABILITY

- Audit trail
- Investigator triangulation
- Participant verification
- Literature control

## CONFIRMABILITY

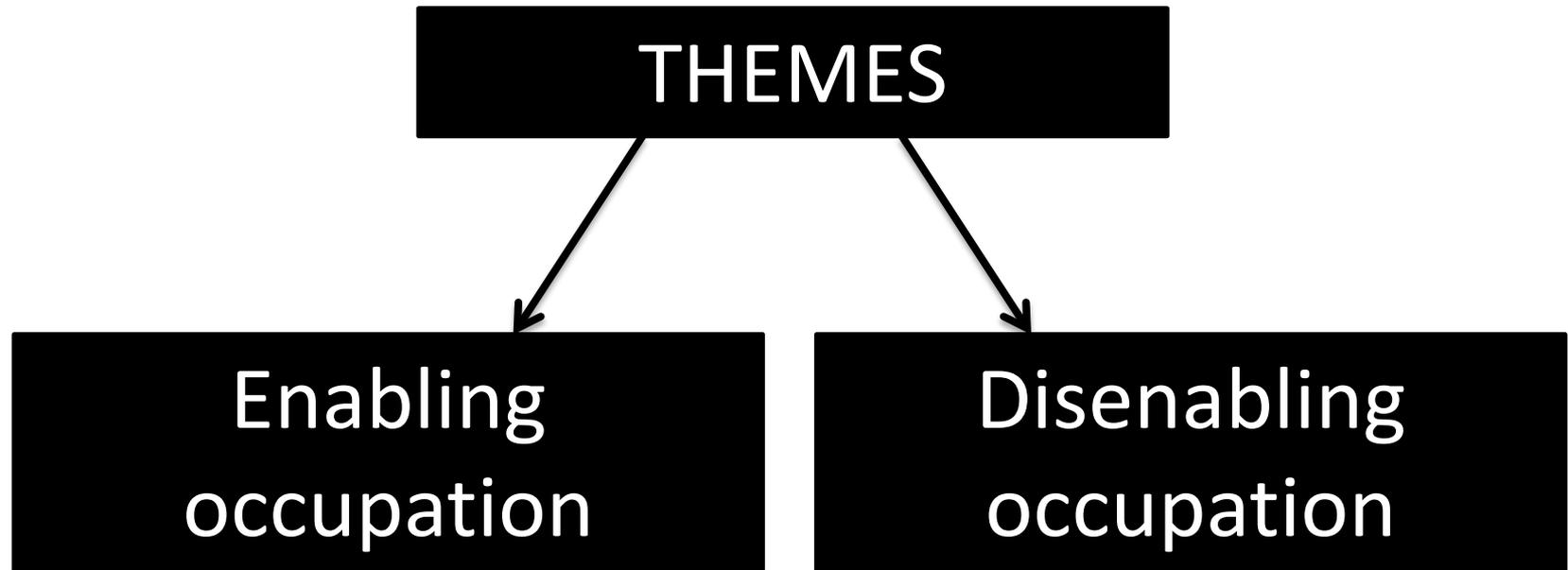
- Thick, rich descriptions
- Investigator triangulation
- Participant verification
- Peer review

# ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Approval from the Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee of the UFS (ECUFS213/2012)
- Permission
- Informed consent
- Communication of research findings
- Acknowledgements of participants

# PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

# FINDINGS



# FINDINGS

Theme	Categories	Codes
ENABLING OCCUPATION	Effective communication strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Formalised communication structure</li> <li>b. Clarity, transparency and feedback</li> <li>c. Community representatives as communication mediators</li> </ul>
	Collaborative planning and project selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Collaborative goal-setting and decision-making</li> <li>b. Ensuring stakeholder buy-in</li> <li>c. Addressing real needs</li> <li>d. Connecting with the existing</li> </ul>
	Interdependence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Fostering relationships</li> <li>b. Working together</li> <li>c. Reciprocity</li> </ul>
	Meeting tacit needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Providing something new</li> <li>b. Being present and showing interest</li> <li>c. Making memories</li> </ul>
	Positive student attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Student commitment and professionalism</li> <li>b. Quality of student service</li> </ul>
	Enabling service activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Training strategies</li> <li>b. Involving the wider community</li> <li>c. Delivering tangible products</li> <li>d. Infrastructure development</li> </ul>
	Successful outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Attitudinal change leading to practice reform</li> <li>b. Enhancing confidence and dignity</li> <li>c. Enhancing occupational participation</li> <li>d. Promoting students' social responsibility</li> </ul>

# EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

- a. Formalised communication structure
- b. Clarity, transparency and feedback
- c. Community representatives as communication mediators

*If there was something, I addressed it immediately. And if you were uncertain about something, you communicated it with me. So, mistakes were always eliminated because our communication was so open and so good (P2).*

# COLLABORATIVE PLANNING AND PROJECT SELECTION

- a. Collaborative goal-setting and decision-making
- b. Ensuring stakeholder buy-in
- c. Addressing real needs
- d. Connecting with the existing

*Because there was cooperation and everyone was enthusiastic and everyone related to it. ... So, this I think is a success story, the fact that we sat together and planned together (P2).*

# INTERDEPENDENCE

- a. Fostering relationships
- b. Working together
- c. Reciprocity

*You know, it was always [a relationship] of: there is no big brother. ... the supervisors from the university, of these students, never came with the attitude of: we know everything and you know nothing. So, there was no big brother in this relationship. The absolute respect with which they treated all their role players, including myself, that was ... [the] biggest contributing factor for me – because all of the sudden here we are – I want to talk about the space of action – now I am here with people, my equals (P3).*

# MEETING TACIT NEEDS

- a. Providing something new
- b. Being present and showing interest
- c. Making memories

*And just to know – to just have that reassurance that people, professional people, people that are trained in that field, just to receive that reassurance from them: you are on the right track (P3).*

# POSITIVE STUDENT ATTRIBUTES

- a. Student commitment and professionalism
- b. Quality of student service

*Done very professionally. Yes, I was really astonished to think that fourth-year students could do it so professionally. Yes, it really was of the highest quality for me (P1).*

# ENABLING SERVICE ACTIVITIES

- a. Training strategies
- b. Involving the wider community
- c. Delivering tangible products
- d. Infrastructure development

*[The students] come here, talk with them. They train them and they did tell them how to do it or how to handle the kids. And then they [the teachers] ... take that information and use it. And then it works (P4).*

# SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES

- a. Attitudinal change leading to practice reform
- b. Enhancing confidence and dignity
- c. Enhancing occupational participation
- d. Promoting students' social responsibility

*Because otherwise they sit here. They feel their children had rejected them. They feel the community had rejected them. They are too old to do something. And here comes the students and they learn something from the elderly person. I think it means incredibly much to the elderly. A little upliftment, being a bit more human again, a bit – feeling that they belong. Feeling that they belong again. Yes. Yes, I think it means a lot to them (P1).*

# FINDINGS

Theme	Categories	Codes
DISENABLING OCCUPATION	Intermittent contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Lack of continuity</li> <li>b. Goals not realised</li> </ul>
	Managerial challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Initiator power</li> <li>b. Enthusiasm vs. planning</li> <li>c. Management of logistics</li> <li>d. Linking with government structures</li> </ul>
	Barriers to sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Discrepancies between expectations and capabilities</li> <li>b. Poor follow-up</li> <li>c. Staff shortage and staff turnover</li> <li>d. Ontological barriers</li> </ul>
	Risks to students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Risk to personal safety</li> <li>b. Unpreparedness for realities of community</li> <li>c. Project failure</li> </ul>

# INTERMITTENT CONTACT

- a. Lack of continuity
- b. Goals not realised

*You know, if there is no continuity, it is bad, and then, like the mosaic project, the children started with it and now it has slowed down (P6).*

# MANAGERIAL CHALLENGES

- a. Initiator power
- b. Enthusiasm vs. planning
- c. Management of logistics
- d. Linking with government structures

*And then [LECTURER] was very excited. ... And she came one day ... like a whirlwind and said: I am going to bring students to you. Is that fine? I said: no, it's fine. It sounds good. And so she brought the first group of students. ... And some of the students then continued and it was unstructured in a way... [T]he first year of my involvement at [INSTITUTION] ... I was too hasty and did not plan and the things that I wanted to implement, did not work. Then I decided: let us stand back and start again from the beginning (P5).*

# BARRIERS TO SUSTAINABILITY

- a. Discrepancies between expectations and capabilities
- b. Poor follow-up
- c. Staff shortage and staff turnover
- d. Ontological barriers

*... we are more care oriented and the occupational therapists are more environment oriented ... if I can express it like that. And the one that does the care does not necessarily realise that the larger environment plays a substantial role in the caregiving. Nursing staff are more task-oriented. ... You do a thing and you get it done. ... We try to do as little as possible for the elderly people, but there are certain reasons why things are done. And then the students come and they think no, this guy is so nice, he will be able to do it [himself]. Then for the one meal when they are there, he eats by himself, but the next meal when they are not there, he throws the plate of food on the floor. And then it takes more time to clean up ... than had you fed him from the start. And there is a fine balance that must be reached (P6).*

# RISKS TO STUDENTS

- a. Risk to personal safety
- b. Unpreparedness for realities of community
- c. Project failure

*And I think that if a student struggles and is discouraged and is unsuccessful, you are put off from geriatrics forever in your life. ... But if you are successful here, then you can take it into the future and say: jo, but this is what I learned. Let me help you (P6).*

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

# FINDINGS

Theme	Categories	Codes
ENABLING OCCUPATION	Effective communication strategies	Objective 3: To describe community representatives' perceptions regarding <u>facilitating factors</u> to enabling occupation in occupational therapy service learning engagements.
	Collaborative planning and project selection	
	Interdependence	
	Meeting tacit needs	
	Positive student attributes	
	Enabling service activities	Objective 1: To describe the perceptions of community representatives regarding <u>enabling occupation</u> through service learning.
	Successful outcomes	

# FINDINGS

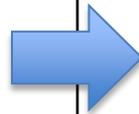
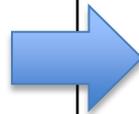
Theme	Categories	Codes
DISENABLING OCCUPATION	Intermittent contact	Objective 2: To describe community representatives' perceptions regarding <u>barriers</u> to enabling occupation in occupational therapy service learning engagements.
	Managerial challenges	
	Barriers to sustainability	
	Risks to students	

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Successful outcomes
  - Evidence for practice
  - Possibilities for future engagements
- Facilitating factors
  - Optimising
  - Pro-active utilisation

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Barriers	Limit with facilitator
<p>Intermittent contact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Lack of continuity</li> <li>b. Goals not realised</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formalised communication structure</li> <li>• Clarity, transparency and feedback</li> </ul>
<p>Managerial challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Initiator power</li> <li>b. Enthusiasm vs. planning</li> <li>c. Management of logistics</li> <li>d. Linking with government structures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fostering relationships</li> <li>• Collaborative planning and project selection</li> <li>• Involving the wider community</li> </ul>
<p>Barriers to sustainability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Discrepancies between expectations and capabilities</li> <li>b. Poor follow-up</li> <li>c. Staff shortage and staff turnover</li> <li>d. Ontological barriers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborative planning and project selection (NB: maintenance- and exit-strategies)</li> <li>• Fostering relationships (NB: Inter-professional and inter-cultural competence)</li> </ul>
<p>Risks to students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Risk to personal safety</li> <li>b. Unpreparedness for realities of community</li> <li>c. Project failure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community representatives as communication mediators</li> <li>• Risk management</li> <li>• Collaborative planning and project-selection</li> </ul>



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Studies into the intricacies of **power relations** in occupational therapy service learning engagements.
- **Long-term impact studies** on the impact of occupational therapy service learning engagements in communities.
- Future studies that explore occupational enablement from the perceptions of **community members** themselves is recommended to expand on the anecdotal descriptions of community representatives presented in this study.
- Further investigation into the **ethical issues** that arose during the course of this study, particularly those relating to the personal acknowledgement of individual participants, as co-creators of knowledge, in a study positioned in the constructivist paradigm.

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  - Mrs. H. Janse van Rensburg
  - Mrs. A. Ntsoia
  - Mr. C. Lebaka
  - Sr. H. Britz
  - Mrs. C. Lubbe
  - ...as well as participants who chose not to be named
- Staff: Department of Occupational Therapy, UFS

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# THANK YOU

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