Facilitating a co-constructed learning environment for caregivers in social gerontology: applying the 'Ripples on a Pond' model

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MA Research Psychology

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree Magister Artium in Research Psychology at the North-West University

Potchefstroom Campus

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PERMISSION STATEMENT

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To Whom it May Concern

Permission is hereby granted for the following manuscript:

Facilitating a co-constructed learning environment for caregivers in social gerontology: applying the 'Ripples on a Pond' model, to be submitted by Magdel Fivaz for the purpose of obtaining the degree Magister Artium in Research Psychology.

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SUMMARY

Populations are growing worldwide and many governments, including the South African government, are failing to implement training programmes for caregivers of older persons. Educational opportunities in gerontology are offered mainly to registered students in formal curricula and are therefore inaccessible to non-students. It was consequently decided to design and implement an informal training programme on social gerontology. The training programme was presented by the North-West University in collaboration with the United Nations (UN) International Institute on Ageing. Participatory action research (PAR) and the Ripples on a Pond (ROP) model were used to guide the research, which involved nine presenters, 52 participants and three facilitators who facilitated the training programme. The participants' reflections, formal evaluations, voluntary feedback, requested feedback and the group assignment results were collected as data and analysed using thematic content analysis to explore how a co-constructed learning environment could be facilitated. Two main themes emerged from the data, namely knowledge as a resource that could be gained and differentiated so as to enable the identification of specific knowledge needs as well as the transfer of knowledge as resource to different contexts. The second theme concerned the factors that facilitated a co-constructed learning environment. It emerged that group work facilitated collaboration and that the participants engaged on different levels of sharing and participating during the training programme. It also seemed that the participants' attention was focused through group assignments, through the ways in which the programme was structured and through the content of the programme. The co-constructed learning environment seemingly contributed to the active involvement of the participants enabling them to adopt different positions regarding the use of knowledge as a resource. With the ROP model, the programme created a want and a need to learn in the participants and enabled them to recognise their own contributions as well as the input from others. The co-construction of a learning environment was promoted by focusing the

participants' attention on the content by requiring them to complete group assignments. The overlapping processes of the ROP guided the group assignments by creating the need to obtain more information in order to complete the assignments. During the training programme, all the participants contributed to the learning environment by being recognised as active participants and by providing a space for discussions in which constructive feedback was continuously provided. Learning in this sense was thus no longer regarded as a one-dimensional process in which knowledge as a construct was transferred from the presenters to the attendees. The training programme included all the ROP stages of 'wanting', 'needing', 'doing', 'feedback' and 'digesting'. The findings suggest that PAR and ROP have considerable potential to facilitate a co-constructed learning environment. It is therefore recommended that the research findings should be applied to other training programmes involving adult learners.

OPSOMMING

Dit is wêreldwyd so dat bevolkingsgroei 'n groter wordende groep bejaardes tot gevolg het. Baie regerings, soos ook die Suid-Afrikaanse regering, faal daarin om opleidingsprogramme vir versorgers van ouer persone aan te bied. Opleidingsgeleenthede in Gerontologie word hoofsaaklik binne formele kurrikula aan geregistreerde studente gebied en is daarom dus nie toeganklik aan enige iemand wat nie 'n ingeskrewe student is nie. Om hierdie rede is besluit om 'n informele opleidingsprogram wat op sosiale Gerontologie fokus, te ontwerp en te implementeer. Die opleidingsprogram is aangebied deur die Noordwes-universiteit in samewerking met die Verenigde Volke (United Nations, UN) se Internasionale Instituut vir Veroudering (International Institute on Ageing). Die navorsing is gerig deur Deelnemende Aksienavorsing (Participatory Action Research, PAR) en die Ripples on a Pond-model (ROP). Nege aanbieders, waarvan drie as fasiliteerders vir die leerprogram opgetree het, en 52 deelnemers was hierby betrokke. Data is ingesamel uit die deelnemers se refleksies, formele evaluerings, vrywillige terugvoer, versoekte terugvoer, sowel as die groepopdrag. 'n Analise van hierdie data is deur middel van tematiese inhoudsanalise gedoen ten einde 'n ondersoek uit te voer van hoe 'n ko-gekonstrueerde leeromgewing gefasiliteer is. Uit die data het twee hooftemas na vore gekom, naamlik kennis as 'n hulpbron — wat beskryf word in terme van kennis wat as 'n hulpbron verwerf kan word, en wat gedifferensieer kan word tot die vermoë om spesifieke kennisbehoeftes te kan identifiseer; sowel as die vermoë om kennis as 'n hulpbron na verskillende kontekste oor te kan dra. Die tweede tema wat na vore gekom het, behels die aspekte wat 'n ko-gekonstrueerde leeromgewing gefasiliteer het. Hieruit het die volgende aspekte geblyk: dat groepwerk samewerking fasiliteer, en dat die deelnemers gedurende die opleidingsprogram op verskillende vlakke van deel en deelname betrokke geraak het. Dit het ook geblyk dat die deelnemers se aandag gefokus is deur die gebruik van groepopdragte, sowel as die manier waarop die program gestruktureer is en die manier waarop die inhoud by

die program betrek is – sodat dit bygedra het tot die fasilitering van 'n ko-gekonstrueerde leeromgewing. Voorts het dit beblyk asof hierdie soort leeromgewing bygedra het tot die deelnemers se aktiewe deelname. Hulle was in staat om verskillende houdings teenoor die gebruik van kennis as 'n hulpbron in te neem. Die program is, aan die hand van die ROP-model, op só manier gestruktureer dat 'n behoefte aan leer en ook die wil om te leer, by die deelnemers geskep is. Voorts het die gegewe dat die deelnemers by groepwerk betrek is, dit vir hulle moontlik gemaak om sowel hulle eie bydraes, as insette deur ander, te eien. Die ko-konstruering van 'n leeromgewing is bevorder deurdat die deelnemers se aandag op die inhoud gefokus is as gevolg van die vereiste dat 'n groepopdrag voltooi moet word. Die oorvleuelende prosesse van die ROP het die groepopdragte gerig, aangesien 'n behoefte geskep is dat meer inligting verkry moes word ten einde die opdrag te kan voltooi. Gedurende die implementering van die opleidingsprogram het al die deelnemers tot die leeromgewing bygedra aangesien hulle as aktiewe deelnemers erken is en ook omdat 'n ruimte voorsien is vir besprekings waarby hulle betrokke was, terwyl konstruktiewe terugvoer deurentyd gelewer is. Leer word derhalwe nie meer slegs as 'n eendimensionele proses beskou waarin kennis as 'n konstruk, naamlik van aanbieders na deelnemers, oorgedra word nie. Die leerprogram het al die ROP-stadia ingesluit: 'wil hê' (*wanting*), 'benodig' (*needing*), 'doen' (*doing*), 'terugvoer' (*feedback*) en 'verwerking' (*digesting*). Uit die bevindinge het dit geblyk dat groot potensiaal bestaan wanneer PAR en ROP in die fasilitering van 'n ko-gekonstrueerde leeromgewing gebruik word. Hierom word aanbeveel dat die bevindinge van hierdie navorsing op meer opleidingsprogramme waaraan volwasse leerders deelneem, toegepas word.

MANUSCRIPT FOR EXAMINATION

Facilitating a co-constructed learning environment for caregivers in social gerontology: applying the 'Ripples on a Pond' model

Key words: Ripples on a Pond model, participatory action research, adult learning, postmodernism, social constructivism, social gerontology, training programme, co-constructed learning environment

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Facilitating a co-constructed learning environment for caregivers in social gerontology: applying the 'Ripples on a Pond' model

Abstract

In South Africa, few training opportunities exist for caregivers of older persons. To fill this gap, an informal training programme was implemented and presented by the University of the North-West. This article sets out to describe the facilitation of a co-constructed learning environment for social gerontology caregivers by applying participatory action research (PAR) and the Ripples on a Pond (ROP) model. The participants' reflections on the training programme, formal evaluations after the training programme, voluntary and requested feedback, and the group assignment were used as data and thematically analysed. The findings suggest that knowledge was recognised as a resource in the continuous co-constructed processes in the self and between people. The participants realised that they could use knowledge as resource in different contexts, and they were also able to differentiate between specific knowledge needs. A co-constructed learning environment was facilitated by the recognition of the active participation of caregivers, by the development of the programme content and by the constructive feedback in spaces that invited engaged discussions. Together, PAR and ROP provided a basis for developing and implementing training programmes for adult learners. The findings of this research could be applied fruitfully to other training programmes and contexts.

Background and problem statement

In recent decades, population ageing has become an area of concern globally and has posed various challenges (Gachuhi & Kiemo, 2005; Nhongo, 2005). 'Older persons' is defined by the United Nations as people aged 60 years and older (Asagba, 2005). In 1950, there were some 200 million people 60 years and older throughout the world (United Nations, 2007). Currently there are about 580 million, and an upward trend is still evident. It is expected that by 2025 this number will reach 1.2 billion (United Nations, 2007).

The phenomenon of an ageing population is also characteristic of South Africa. Even though Africa's populations are considered the youngest in the world, they too are rapidly growing older (Aboderin, 2006). The 'older persons' population in South Africa currently numbers 3.3 million, which is 7.7% of the total population (Statistics South Africa, 2009). The South African situation should, however, be seen against the unique developing and developed demographical profile of the 60 and older population. Population ageing varies across South Africa's four major population groups, namely the African, white, coloured and Indian groups (Mba, 2005; SA Stats, 2009). Considerable differences exist in the ageing patterns owing to differences in the four groups' fertility, morality and accessibility to resources (Department of Health, 2010; Mba, 2005). The differences can also be attributed to different socioeconomic divisions along racial and urban/rural lines (Department of Health, 2010; Mba, 2005) (Table 1a & b). It is anticipated that the number of older persons will reach 4.24 million by 2015 and 5.23 million by 2025, which will approximate to 10.5% of the estimated total South African population at that stage (Joubert & Bradshaw, 2006; Ogwumike & Aboderin, 2005; Department of Health, 2010).

Table 1(a): Mid-year population estimates for the medium variant by population group,

age and sex, 2009

	African			Indian/Asian		
Age	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
60-64	363 100	480 700	843 800	23 500	26 700	50 200
65-69	256 200	352 900	609 100	17 200	20 300	37 500
70-74	171 300	260 000	431 300	11 100	14 400	25 500
75-79	103 100	168 500	271 600	6 700	9 400	16 100
80+	68 100	126 900	195 000	4 500	7 500	12 000
Total	18 901 000	20 235 200	39 136 200	635 700	643 400	1 279 100
	Coloured			White		
Age	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
60-64	50 200	65 200	115 400	138 500	151 200	289 700
65-69	35 000	46 000	81 000	110 800	123 400	234 200
70-74	23 700	35 300	59 000	71 800	87 100	158 900
75-79	13 200	22 200	35 400	42 400	61 100	103 500
80+	8 300	16 000	24 300	37 900	72 100	110 000
Total	2 137 300	2 295 800	4 433 100	2 194 700	2 277 400	4 472 100
All numbers have been rounded off to the nearest hundred.						

Source: Statistics South Africa, 2009

Table 1(b): Mid-year population estimates for the medium variant of South Africa, 2009

Age	South Africa		
	Male	Female	Total
60-64	575 300	723 800	1 299 100
65-69	419 200	542 600	961 800
70-74	277 900	396 800	674 700
75-79	165 400	261 200	426 600
80+	118 800	222 500	341 300
Total	23 868 700	25 451 800	49 320 500
	All numbers have been rounded off to the nearest hundred.		

Source: Statistics South Africa, 2009

Although populations are growing worldwide, many governments are not implementing training programmes for caregivers of older persons (Aboderin, 2005). Gerontology is evidently not regarded as a priority in government policies and programmes (Ferreira, 2005), and the South African government's policies are no exception to this. For example, the Second World Assembly on Ageing held in Madrid in April 2002 stressed that ageing was not simply an issue of social security and welfare but of overall development and economic policy and that, therefore, a holistic approach to ageing was needed. The South African government promulgated the Older Persons Act only in June 2006, and, although they signed the Madrid International Plan of Action, a South African Plan of Action has only recently been drafted. The plan is currently being discussed with national departments with a view to finding funds to implement it (Department of Health, 2010). According to the South African Progress Report on the Madrid Plan of Action (Department of Health, 2010), the responsibility for implementing the plan of action rests with the government. The report also stressed the importance of the government's partnership with civil society, the private sector and older persons themselves. Governments were accordingly expected to start mainstreaming ageing concerns into national

developmental frameworks. Understandably, there is some fear that the momentum created by the Madrid Assembly will dissipate (Aboderin, 2005).

The fact that the South African Plan of Action is still in draft format means that there is a lack of coordinated training opportunities for practitioners and policy makers involved in programmes and interventions for older persons. What exacerbates the problem is that educational opportunities are often offered only to registered students as such opportunities form part of formal curricula and are therefore inaccessible to non-students (Aboderin, 2005; Apt, 2005; Gachuhi & Kiemo, 2005).

It is against this background that an informal training programme that recognises people's potential as well as their contributions as scholars of life was devised and implemented between 6 and 13 December 2008 for caregivers of older persons. The programme, which was advertised at all institutions linked to the elderly, was jointly presented by the North-West University and the United Nations (UN) International Institute on Ageing. The NWU has an established research interest in older persons and was approached by the UN to present the training in South Africa. The training took place at the Human Rights Commission's buildings in Johannesburg.

This article describes the processes that facilitated a co-constructed learning environment during the implementation of the programme. These processes included the application of the Ripples on a Pond (ROP) model. Caregivers of older persons participated actively in the programme through participatory action research (PAR). The study was underpinned by postmodernism and social constructivism theories in particular. The postmodern worldview places a high value on individual differences in meaning and the importance of meaning construction (Young & Collin, 2004). In the present research, the different meanings the

participants constructed from their own experiences were respected and applied in the implementation of the training (Strydom, 2002a).

The article includes a discussion on the presenters and participants who took part in the training, the format of the training programme that was conducted over a period of six days, the content of the training and the facilitation of a co-constructed learning environment. PAR is discussed as a research method and the ROP model as the model employed to facilitate the training. The various methods used to collect the data illustrate how awareness was created and how motivation and enthusiasm were promoted among the participants who actively participated in the learning activities. Trustworthy guidelines are discussed to illustrate the integrity of the findings, and the article concludes with a critical examination of the value of the ROP model in adult learning.

Participants and programme content

The participants in the learning environment included the nine presenters of the different discussion topics in the programme from the ranks of academia, private practitioners and senior government officials, and 52 professionals such as social workers and non-governmental organisation representatives who shared an interest in and concern about the wellbeing and quality of life of older persons. Three facilitators helped the participants digest the learning material by asking critical questions and by focusing attention on the learning content. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), collaboration between different disciplines contributes to the credibility of findings since it provides a diversity of approaches to the topics under discussion. Lincoln and Guba (1985) call this triangulation of investigators.

The participants consisted of 20 men and 41 women from diverse professional, ethnic and language backgrounds (Tables 2 & 3). It is important to note that the participants dealt with

older persons from different cultures and socioeconomic groups in different institutions and community settings. Different perspectives on gerontology were thus represented.

Table 2: Background information on the participants

	Male	Female
Academics	3	5
Private practitioners	3	4
Senior government officials	9	18
Social workers	4	10
Non-governmental organisation representatives	1	4
Total	20	41

Table 3: Cultural representation of participants

Cultural representation	
White	28
Indian	4
Black	28
Coloured	1
Total	61

The programme was presented from 8 to 13 December 2008 and included morning and afternoon sessions, which contributed to time sampling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This prolonged engagement increased the credibility of the findings as the participants became accustomed to the presenters, and the researchers became more familiar with the research context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The programme content was broadly based on national and international academic and policy discourses, embedded within developing world practices, and followed a specific flow to encourage engagement between the training programme participants

(presenters as well as attendees). For example, in the first session of the programme entitled 'Setting the scene', the participants were introduced to one another, and specific questions were asked about what each participant could contribute to the learning context. This session also introduced the participants to the field in which they were going to work. Each participant was considered an equal partner in the process, which is in line with PAR where people's own experience is regarded as instrumental in the learning process (Scheidt & Windley, 2006; Schurink, 1998; Strydom, 2002a; Zuber-Skerritt, 2002). The participants brought their own experiences and knowledge to the study, which constituted for truth value (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Various topics within the broad context of current national and international ageing discourses and policies on social gerontology were presented during the interactive sessions. These topics included the demographics of global population ageing, policies on ageing such as the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing and the recently promulgated Older Persons Act of 2006, the demographic and socioeconomic implications of ageing for South Africa, the ecology of poverty in old age, older people and HIV/AIDS, care management for and by older people, and programming, implementation and evaluation.

The training programme was implemented in such a way that learning was treated as an interrelated circular learning process. Small group interactions helped facilitate a co-constructed learning environment, and the active involvement of participants was encouraged throughout (Schurink, 1998; Strydom, 2002b).

The participants voluntarily registered for the training programme, and written permission for their inclusion in the research was obtained from the individual participants by means of signed informed consent forms. The participants were told that their participation was voluntary, that

the data would be treated with confidentiality and that they could withdraw from the research at any time without being penalised. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus. The project title was "An exploration of enabling contexts" and the project approval number was 05K14.

Research methodology and educational model

The aim of the study was not to evaluate the training programme in terms of formative and evaluative outcomes but rather to describe the facilitation of a co-constructed learning environment.

Participatory action research (PAR) was combined with Race's (2001) Ripples on a Pond (ROP) model. PAR was used as the research method to describe the research process, and ROP was used as the educational model that guided the facilitation of the learning processes. PAR recognises the active involvement of participants who act and possess knowledge as equals (Strydom, 2002a). Strydom (2002b, p. 280) defines PAR as "a qualitative research procedure that studies the natural and everyday set-up in a particular community or situation". PAR is based on the worldview that there is no outside 'true' reality and that "the researcher is subject within a world of separate objects" (Reason in Schurink, 1998, p. 415). In the present research, the responsibility for generating and collating knowledge lay with the participants. Strydom (2002b) maintains that people's conception of reality is not directly accessible to outsiders and that methods are required to unravel such conceptions as accurately as possible. In line with PAR, each participant was regarded as an equal partner in the process, and the participants' own experience was considered central to the learning process (Scheidt & Windley, 2006; Strydom, 2002a; Zuber-Skerritt, 2002).

In PAR, the individual is regarded as an active rather than a passive participant in the process of learning (Strydom, 2002a; Zuber-Skerritt, 2002). This implies that, in the present research, the participants drew on their own experiences and knowledge to discover and remember new truths more effectively. This discovery of new knowledge emanated from their interactions with one another (Learning Theories Knowledgebase, 2010).

According to PAR, learning takes place in four sequential stages: planning, action, observation and reflection (Scheidt & Windley, 2006; Zuber-Skerritt, 2002). Five overlapping ROP processes were used to facilitate the learning experience: 1) Creating motivation, interest and enthusiasm for learning (*wanting*); 2) Establishing the *need* to learn; 3) Learning by *doing*; 4) Getting *feedback* on how the learning was experienced; and 5) Making sense of what was learnt by internalising newly gained knowledge (*digesting*) (Race, 2001, p. 11) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Race's Ripples on a Pond model
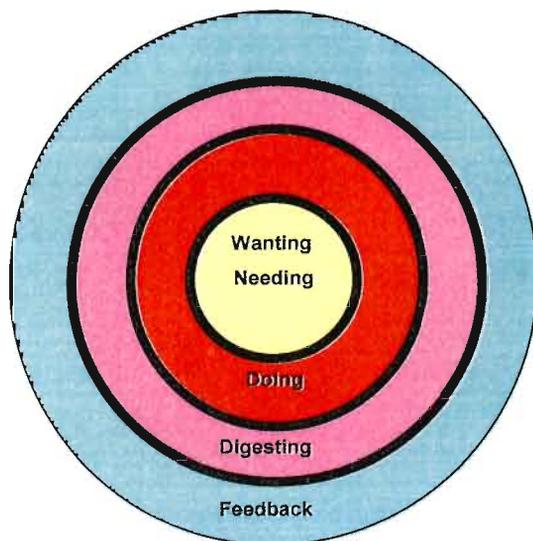
Source: Race (2001)

Data collection

Various kinds of data were collected in different ways throughout the training programme thus contributing to the trustworthiness of the findings through data triangulation as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Firstly − every morning the participants had to reflect on the previous day's session to answer three questions. The repetitive nature of such questions enhances the credibility of the findings, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985).

1. *What did you learn?*

2. *Did you have a starting point?*

3. *Any questions?*

Secondly − the participants were handed formal evaluations to fill in at the end of the programme. They had to rate each day's session on a 5-point scale from Excellent to Poor. There was also an open-ended section where the participants could comment on the day's sessions. The open-ended questions included the following questions.

1. *How could this workshop be improved?*

2. *What aspect of the workshop did you find most useful, and why?*

3. *Which aspects of the workshop could be improved, and how?*

4. *Which topics were of most interest to you?*

5. *Which topics were not covered that you would have found helpful?*

6. *We welcome any additional comments you may have on our speakers, facilitators, workshop materials and any other aspects of the training programme.*

Thirdly – as part of the requirements of the programme, the participants had to develop Intervention Initiatives (In In's) in which their existing knowledge and expertise and newly acquired knowledge were combined into specific action plans. The In In assignment was aimed at assisting the participants to organise information throughout the training programme so that they could apply the information practically. The engagement of the In In's prompted the involvement of the participants in all the processes of ROP as described by Race (2001). The following instructions were given to the participants.

You will be exposed to a lot of information from diverse perspectives on older persons, and you will have to take note of different policies and frameworks. This assignment aims to assist you to organise the information so that you can apply it practically. It is therefore suggested that you use the following questions to organise the information throughout the different presentations.

1. *What did I learn from the presentation that I did not know before?*

2. *How will this information assist me in my work with older persons?*

3. *What practical applications could be made on the basis of the information?*

At the end of the training, you will be required to use all the knowledge that you have gained from the presentations to do, in a group, the following:

Give an example of a specific project in which you illustrate that you have incorporated all the relevant information from the presentations. Your project should include action plans for its planning, implementation and evaluation of an appropriate programme for older persons. You have to be specific in your presentation. The following format could be used.

1. *Name of the project*

2. *Aims of the project*

3. *Information obtained from the workshop that is included in the planning of the project*

   a. *Refer to specific presentations and illustrate their relevance to the project*

   b. *Indicate what other information is needed for the project that was not discussed at the workshop*

   c. *Indicate methods to access the information and from whom*

4. *Action plans to implement the project:*

   a. *Who?*

   b. *Where?*

   c. *When?*

   d. *How?*

5. *Evaluation of the project*

   a. *Measures to evaluate the impact of the project*

The assignment was developed is such a way that it would promote interaction among the groups.

The rationale for the interventions was to describe the context and the problems: Who should carry out the intervention and on behalf of whom? What outcomes could be envisaged? How should the intervention be implemented, monitored and evaluated?

Fourthly – three months after the programme, a participant wrote a letter in which he voluntarily mentioned certain issues related to the training. This letter will constitute part of the thematic content analysis of the study in order to support the findings.

Lastly – a request was made for formal feedback from a participant a year after the training indicating how she and her colleague were using the knowledge they had obtained during the programme. The purpose of the request was to gain insight into the experience of the participant and the meaning that emerged from that experience. The request was purpose driven and included the following open-ended question.

In retrospect, can you describe your experiences and the processes of the training on social gerontology that you underwent in 2008. Which were enabling and which were inhibiting? Please support your statements with examples.

The open-ended format of the question allowed the particular participant to mention any aspect of the programme. Such feedback constitutes member checking, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), and decreases the possibility of misinterpreting the data.

Data analysis

For the purposes of this article, the participants' reflections, the formal evaluations, and the In In's were used for analysis. Other information such as the voluntary feedback from one participant and the requested feedback from another participant were also used as data and analysed. Thematic content analysis, using the methodology suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), was employed in the study. Essentially, thematic analysis entails the identification of patterns and themes, selecting those that are applicable to the particular research and reporting them to those interested (Taylor & Ussher in Braun & Clarke, 2006; De Vos, 2002). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is widely used and involves a number of steps such as reading and rereading the text, identifying themes and coding the data as they relate to the themes. Data analysis can remain at a descriptive level if this methodology is strictly applied. In

analysing these data, an attempt was therefore made to reflect critically on the data and to indicate the implications for the practice.

Findings

The following themes and subthemes emerged from the data.

Table 4: Themes that emerged from the data

Main themes	Subthemes
Knowledge as a resource	Knowledge gaining and applying insight
	Identification of specific knowledge needs
Facilitation of co-constructed learning environment	Group work enabled collaboration and sharing
	Focused attention on group assignment
	Programme structure and content
	Recognition of potential facilitates participation

Each of these themes will be discussed in more detail below.

Theme 1: Knowledge as a resource

Knowledge is regarded as a resource in the continuous co-constructed processes in the self between people. The participants realised that they could use this resource, and they could also differentiate between specific knowledge needs.

Knowledge gaining and applying insight

All the participants had existing knowledge regarding the topic – they attended the training programme in the anticipation that they would gain more knowledge. This is shown in the response of one of the participants:

> *Having worked in the field of providing services to older people for ten years, [I] was interested in gaining an understanding of macro issues surrounding the provision of services to older people.*

One of the participants remarked that "*knowledge is essential*", and another expressed her need as follows: "*more, more and more courses and interaction*", as well as "*we can learn so much from [the presenter]*".

It was observed during the programme that the participants no longer regarded learning as a one-dimensional construct that was carried over from the presenter to the adult learners but was rather the application of the self to different contexts and the ability to make appropriate adjustments. For example, one participant said that what she had learnt "*[was] applicable over a large number of different settings and even over various disciplines*". It thus seemed that the participants had moved from gathering and extending their knowledge to "*gaining insight*".

The participants felt empowered to apply their knowledge. For example, one participant said that the "*group presentations were informative and brought insight on different programmes that*

can be implemented". Another remarked: *"I am sure we will implement some of it in our communities."*

Practical implementation of the new insights is evident in the following statement: *"We want to take this information to FUNDSA to recommend geriatric and gerontology nursing training to be included both in the basic training and specialised level."*

Identification of specific knowledge needs

It appears that the participants were able to express their specific knowledge needs in a more nuanced way after participating in the programme. The general need to gain more knowledge became more focused, and specific training needs in respect of the following were identified.

- The development of residential facilities in line with the Older Persons Act, 2006

- Compliance in terms of the DFMA

- Identification of and intervention in the physical abuse of older persons

- Best practice models in terms of working with older persons

- Cultural myths on ageing

- Importance of research

Theme 2: Facilitation of co-constructed learning environment

Group work enabled collaboration and sharing

The participants enjoyed working in groups to complete the In In assignment. They worked well together although they came from different backgrounds and did not know each other at first. The difference in backgrounds seemed to promote interdisciplinary collaboration and gave the participants another view on their own existing knowledge as can be seen in the following remark.

I really enjoyed the group I worked with – we did not really know each other, but we worked well together and shared our experiences.

Focused attention on group assignment

A focused assignment such as the In In assignment promoted teamwork. One participant remarked as follows:

The completion of the group assignment encouraged teamwork and cooperation and provided the opportunity for the participants to be creative and practical at the same time. It promoted lateral thinking and ensured that the new information that was received was applied to a practical setting in terms of a specific project.

The focused attention of the participants on a shared goal was seemingly considered a productive way to integrate abstract content in a practical manner. One participant said, *"I think it is a good way of seeing what people assimilated in the week"*. It was also remarked that the completion of the assignment resulted in *"an enthusiastic engagement of the whole group throughout the training"*. The participants also believed that by *"breaking the participants into the groups and providing them with the opportunity to engage in discussions while working on the group assignment enabled the content that was presented to be consolidated in the minds of the participants"*.

The focused attention on key points in the presentations promoted dialogue in the group. One participant pointed out that *"the final presentations of participants illustrated the value of participation in learning activities and also provided new perspectives to all of us"*. The participants said that the group presentations were informative and led to greater insight, which confirmed that interactive learning had taken place. Other comments supported this view: *"The group presentations were informative and brought insight."*

Programme structure and content

The participants had to rate each day's topic on a scale that ranged from 'Excellent' to 'Poor' with 'Good' and 'Fair' in between. By quantifying the data, the topics that attracted the most interest could be deduced. These identified topics correlated well with the topics the participants needed specific knowledge on. The first day's session, "Setting the scene: Ageing in the SA context", and the second day's session, "Pan-African policy framework (AU)", gained 'Excellent' scores of 76% and 79% respectively. The topics specifically contextualised the area of social gerontology and triggered the participants' interest, which emerged in the In In presentations.

The programme appeared to inspire the participants. They described the content of the programme as *"encouraging", "eye-opener" and "fascinating"*. One participant actually said: *"This programme served to inspire me."* The words used to describe each day are listed in Table 5 and reflect the participants' evaluation of the training programme.

Day one of the programme was described as *"interesting", "knowledgeable", "informative", "enlightening", "challenging" and "helpful"*. Similar words were used to describe the programme throughout the week (Table 5). The implication is that the training programme stimulated growth in the participants' existing knowledge and promoted a need to learn.

Table 5: Participant reflections revealing the need to learn throughout the programme

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Interesting	Encouraging	Useful	Challenging	Applicable
Knowledgeable	Thought provoking	Positive	Sinvol [Meaningful]	Enlightened
Informative	Informative	Clarifying	Fascinating	Stimulating
Enlightening	Inspiring	Informative	Exciting	Inspirational
Challenging	Practical	Insightful	Prakties [Practical]	Realistic
Helpful	Stimulating	Interesting	Insightful	Practical

Recognition of potential facilitates participation

The participants were regarded as contributors to experience and knowledge and not just as recipients of knowledge. They were actively involved in the co-construction of the learning environment, which is illustrated by the following extract.

> *Another helpful approach was the manner in which the participants were engaged in discussions. The participants were not just viewed as recipients of information but were also valued in terms of the experiences that they brought to the discussion.*

This approach seemingly facilitated a learning environment in which the participants were motivated to participate in the training, to apply their knowledge and to identify specific knowledge.

Integrated critical discussion of the findings

The facilitation of a co-constructed learning environment evidently contributed to the active participation of the participants in the training programme. This environment was sustained by the focused attention on a group assignment. Involving the participants in group work enabled them to recognise their own contributions as well as the input from others thus making the sum

more than the individual parts. The manner in which the participants structured meaning and knowledge were recognised and respected, which made it possible for them to hold different views and occupy different positions in the learning experience. The group also had the shared challenge of integrating knowledge and experience in action plans. The co-constructed learning environment enabled the participants to understand different views regarding knowledge as a resource. As the experiences of the participants were respected, these experiences could be used not only during the training but also in applying their insights in different contexts. Learning by doing something and then reflecting on it – as the participants did in the assignment – is part of the processes described in the ROP model. The overlapping ROP processes guided the In In's because the participants constantly wanted and needed to digest more information so that they could complete the assignment. During and on completion of the assignment, constructive feedback guided the refinement of the possibilities for implementation. Leaning in this sense was thus no longer regarded as a one-dimensional process in which knowledge as a construct was carried over from the presenters to the attendees.

The application of the Ripples on a Pond model facilitated a co-constructed learning environment that lasted for the duration of the training as well as beyond it. One participant stated that learning is sustained when people become active participants. She said: *"[I am] amazed that even though it has been more than a year since the course was run, the content is still fresh in [my] mind. It is [my] opinion that this can be attributed to the approach to learning that was used. It provided an opportunity to critically apply one's mind to the content and use the information in a constructive manner. The opportunities for reflection of the content from the day before helped to reinforce the salient issues."*

Conclusion

This study investigated the facilitation of a co-constructed learning environment by applying the Ripples on a Pond model. The findings suggest that an enabling learning environment was created. The attendees were regarded as active participants as they were able to apply their own knowledge as well as the knowledge that they gained in different contexts. The co-construction of an enabling learning environment could be promoted by including group assignments to encourage collaborative learning. The stages of the Ripples on a Pond model, namely 'wanting', 'needing', 'doing', 'feedback' and 'digesting', were included in the training programme. This approach seemingly contributed to sustained learning during and after the conclusion of the training programme in the participants' work with older persons.

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