

The Community Psychologist as a Reflective Plumber

By Caterina Arcidiacono

University Federico II, Naples, Italy

Keywords: ecological model, systemic approach, positionality, reflexivity, intersectionality, trustfulness

Author Biography: Prof. of Community Psychology, ECPA (European Community Psychology Association) EFPA (European Federation of Psychologists' Association)-Standing Committee on Community Psychology, Email: caterina.arcidiacono@unina.it

Recommended Citation: Arcidiacono, C. (2017). The Community Psychologist as a Reflective Plumber. *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice*, 8(1), pages 1-16. Retrieved Day/Month/Year, from (<http://www.gjcpp.org/>).

The Community Psychologist as a Reflective Plumber

Abstract

The article describes community psychologists' competencies, emphasizing the importance of ecological and systemic perspectives that allow them to deal with individual psychological issues framed in social and cultural domains. Furthermore, it gives evidence of the specific knowledge that the community psychology approach brings to the professional activity: its aims and methodologies. It also explains why individual and social values as well as fairness and justice are affecting psychological, social, and individual well-being. Finally, it describes the community psychology backbone, depicting some peculiar competencies that characterize the interventions of community psychologists in various domains that allow them to use their psychological background in different contexts. These are entailed by the TRIP model, which presents *trustfulness*, *reflexivity*, *intersectionality*, and *positionality* as community psychologists' core methodological acquisitions as well as basic values.

Questioning community psychologists' (CPs) competencies is not only a theoretical issue but also a practical one that gives evidence of specific professional skills and training designs. Do specific competencies exist? What are they? Answering these questions helps define goals, methodologies, and tools to strengthen professional and social recognition. Unfortunately, we are aware that community psychologists, in both the mainstream and their critical approach, face on the one hand a constant reduction in the number of academic positions and on the other the difficulty of identifying their own specific competencies. This state of affairs is widespread in many countries, not only in Europe but globally.

Moreover, the actions of community psychologists does not appear to be a unique area of expertise in psychology, on neither an academic nor a practical level (Reich et al., 2007; Vazquez Rivera, 2010). In a different vein, other approaches employ CP tools and often claim ownership of them. The job market does not recognize specific competencies, skills, and methodologies of CPs; therefore, on the one side they are not fully considered psychologists, and on the

other hand they are more generally included under the wide umbrella of social scientists. Unfortunately, even clearly defined CP competencies (Elias, Neigher, & Johnson-Hakim, 2015; Neigher, Ratcliffe, Wolff, Elias, & Hakim, 2012) do not explicitly relate and refer to the psychological background. Consequently, social actions involving psychologists do not recognize their psychological roots, and all competencies are attributed to the general area of humanities or education. In fact, according to Neigher et al. (2012), CPs "apply well-established psychological principles and techniques, tested and proven in practice, to improve well-being and effectiveness at individual, organizational, and community levels" (2012, p.3), with explicit concern for social justice. However, the big effort of community psychology in defining its own values and goals leaves behind the competencies acquired in psychological training. Therefore, the co-synergistic action of values, visions, and psychological backgrounds is underestimated.

Furthermore, social psychologists "must also deal with the high status given in many psychology departments to neuroscientists

and the biomedical framework, which is focused primarily on the genetic foundations of psychological processes” (Francescato & Zani, 2013, p. 1).

For this reason, we must lay out the competencies and actions of psychologists who work in the social arena. This will help us better outline more opportunity to recognize their significant role and possible training opportunities and intervention strategies. Along the same lines, we should be aware that many interventions that generally pertain to the field of community psychology involve experts and professionals with different backgrounds, including health educators, evaluators, sociologists, social scientists, and community workers. Therefore, entering the debate on the quality and specificity of community psychology competencies, faced by the “Practice competencies in community psychology and their application” (GJCPP 2016, 2017), notable issues of this journal, this article aims to address the following questions:

1. What are the roots and paradigms related to community psychologist competencies?
2. Is there also interdisciplinary or transversal knowledge?
3. If so, what are the specific competencies to be found in this discipline? Are community psychologists involved in specific activities?
4. How can we define which knowledge and actions characterize community psychology?

Roots and Paradigms

Community psychology (CP) has its roots in the ecological paradigm (Kelly, 1986; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Prilleltensky, 2001, 2008, 2012; Christens & Perkins, 2008). It is well known that CP concerns the relationships of individuals with communities and societies at the intra-psychic, interpersonal, organizational, cultural, and

political levels. Therefore, CP is based on neither the individual nor the community but on their linkage. All these interactions between different domains exist in a systemic interdependence, although only some authors give specific evidence of it (e.g., Kelly, 2006; Murrell, 1973; Stark, 2012). The CP vision has also tacitly acquired legacy from the systemic approach proposed by the models of Bateson (1972) and von Bertalanffy (1968). Social events and individual determinants are intertwined: “Multiple determination is characteristic of all biological fields. Characteristically, every feature of the anatomy of an animal or plant and every detail of behavior is determined by a multitude of interacting factors at both the genetic and physiological levels; and, correspondingly, the processes of any ongoing ecosystem are the outcome of multiple determination” (Bateson, 1972, p. 505).

CP is aware that the complexity of social changes and social issues such as marginalization and social exclusion constitute relevant areas of study and intervention, and its contribution offers a specific approach by placing the individuals and, more specifically, the citizens at the center thereof. The scholarship of Orford (2008), Prilleltensky (2008), and the Italian Amerio (2000) is the bedrock of the importance attributed to social contexts: According to the latter, community psychology is the discipline that studies the ways in which mental and practical phenomena as well as behaviors reciprocally interact within the social context. This is done by linking the analysis of individual psychological processes with that of social dynamics (Amerio, 2000). Therefore, CP is the innovative paradigm of social psychology that best explains and makes the greatest use of the Lewin’s basic formula stating that *behavior is a function of the person and his or her environment* (Lewin, 1936). When we refer to context,

we do so in its broadest sense: i.e. context – along with the opportunities it offers, the frame of relationships it weaves, and the material as well as the intangible characteristics that comprise it – is the underlying ground upon which it is possible to build up a well-lived existence. Context, thus, is not a backdrop; it is indeed part and parcel of the very theatrical play in which social actors perform their lives. (Arcidiacono & Di Martino, 2012, p. 63)

In a *critical approach*, CP seeks to prevent or reduce the negative mental health consequences of our societal arrangements by working collaboratively at both the objective and subjective levels with persons, in their everyday community contexts, to increase their control over their lives by facilitating their competence to bring about social change. Therefore, CP is the discipline that:

- Provides the basic assumptions for the study of social phenomena in relation to the living contexts of individuals.
- Places attention on the different interactions between individuals and their life contexts.
- Gives a voice to the experience of local people and promotes communication between different social and political actors. To this end, CP intervenes for social transformation to meet the needs and expectations of all social actors.
- According to (Hanlin *et al.*, 2008), community psychologists are characterized by:
 - Shared assumptions: the action of power and environmental influence on individual and social behavior;
 - Values: the need to change the system of inequality (Prilleltensky, 2001);
 - An ecological paradigm where “the ecological principles of interaction between populations and the community,

eco-system and biosphere are analogized to the interaction of individuals with their community, environment, society and world” (Hanlin *et al.*, 2008, p. 525); and

- Goals: the action on social change (Jason, 1991).

However, it is evident that these dimensions can be shared with activists, other professionals, and even engaged citizens. Thus, they are not the hallmarks of psychologists. At the same time, community psychologists integrate all this general knowledge into their wider psychological background. These are CPs’ skills: They know about the individual psyche but include this knowledge in a wider and more integrated perspective. CPs deal with emotions, beliefs, cognition, and conscious and unconscious knowledge as well as self-esteem, depression, rage, powerlessness, etc., but at the same time, they are able to place these dimensions in a wider – and contextualized – perspective. They tackle distrust, helplessness, and lack of social involvement while they strive to build social bonds.

Interdisciplinarity and transversal knowledge

As well as needing to define CPs’ assumptions, it is important to remember its interdisciplinary aspects. For instance, there is no explicit recognition of what has been borrowed by pedagogues (Freire, 1970) and Marxist sociologists (Fals Borda, 1979, 2001) regarding owned and shared thoughts, nor has the concept of capability proposed by Nussbaum and Sen (Nussbaum, 2011; Nussbaum & Sen, 1993) – philosopher and economist, respectively – which enriches the basic CP concepts of empowerment and social agency. It is also not easy to understand how competence and knowledge of diverse professions interact in the communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) and in service learning (Zani, 2016). On these premises, Monteiro and colleagues affirm the importance of interdisciplinarity in training in community psychology, highlighting the

interaction with other fields of human sciences, particularly economics, sociology, and anthropology. The interdisciplinarity in community psychology could be established as a critical and political epistemological requirement, based on the principle of complexity (Monteiro, Campos, & Figueiredo, 2016). Definitions of these specific disciplinary competencies and the specific work contexts make it difficult to construct the dialectic between disciplinary competencies and their place in an interdisciplinary perspective. The risk is that the specificity of the single profession becomes flattened in a generic definition of social scientists. Bosio and Lozza (2013), from the Catholic University of Milan, state in reference to psychology,

In the moment that a discipline opens itself up to a variety of professional opportunities, the chance of maintaining a privileged dominion over specific services and skills is reduced and the competition with professionals offering their selves for analogous services increases. (p. 683)

This statement is even truer for community psychology, where the contribution of social knowledge causes one to lose sight of the complexity of the learned knowledge. If indeed society is a complex system (Morin, 1976), we must also be aware of how knowledge and disciplines interact. Therefore, I fully support the importance of transdisciplinary dialogue, but I do not agree that “the concept of community psychology is transdisciplinary by nature” (Stark 2012, p. 44) as described in the last paragraph. CP has its own methodologies and competencies to share and help expand the wider scientific and social basket.

Methodologies and Practical Skills

In 2012, Dalton and Wolfe proposed a guideline list of 18 competencies for practice. This was further discussed among scholars and professionals (Wolfe, Chien-Scott, &

Jimenez, 2013), as well as within the Society for Community Research and Action (SCRA), and was granted approval by the SCRA Executive Committee. This has been a significant step in defining CP practice, but it leaves many questions unanswered.

Their short description of competencies is not directly connected with implications concerning methodologies and practical skills. As community psychologists, their list of competencies is part of what forms our discipline; however, this is not enough. The authors have clearly defined our main goals, but their descriptions do not state specific knowledge (tools and methods). Context analysis, community building, group interventions, and many others are all activities likely to be employed by activists, social workers, pedagogues, and sociologists. What, then, are the CP hallmarks?

By the same token, Francescato and Zani (2013) state that community psychologists “act as successful facilitators in: (a) increasing social ties and trust, and individual, small group, organizational and community empowerment; (b) promoting active participation; (c) helping people solve conflicts constructively; (d) consolidating social networks and (e) promoting sense of community” (p. 8). Action research, program planning and evaluation, quantitative and qualitative data analysis, and networking with unions, i.e., organizations of all types, and promoting partnership with public institutions at the regional and local levels are all skills useful for the aforementioned activities, but they also belong to social scientists and sometimes even to social activists.

Furthermore, Francescato and Zani say,

Community psychology interventions should: Encourage pluralistic interpretations of social problems that integrate objective and subjective knowledge, and broaden the

viewpoints from which a given situation can be considered.

- Examine the historical roots of social problems and the unequal distribution of power and access to resources in the social context.
- Give voice to minority narratives, and promote the production of new metaphors or new narratives that help 'imagine' new scripts and roles for individuals and social groups.
- Create ties among people who share a problem.
- Identify the points of strength to obtain a change.
- Spread psychological knowledge and competencies. (2013, p. 3)

Again, going beyond Dalton and Wolfe's preliminary recognition of competencies, there is a need to define how CPs pursue and reach these goals. First, it is to be remembered that the distinctiveness of community psychology as a discipline lies in its capacity to deal with psychological interventions in all environmental contexts, which considers not only the study of facts but also the meaning attributed to them and their significance at the individual and social levels: feelings, emotions, representations, attributions, and perceived and detected power. Further knowledge is needed in designing interventions and taking action at the individual relational and community levels.

CP backbone

The backbone of community psychologist competencies concerns the following:

- 1) It involves knowledge about representations, emotions, attributions and stereotypes, symbols, and a sense of meaning. These competencies are rooted in the traditional psychological background that allows us to analyze

people, places, and contexts based on the following:

- a) Circumstances and social facts: socio-environmental and structural data, i.e., community profiling (Francescato & Zani, 2013; Arcidiacono et al, 2016)
 - b) Feelings and mental representations (i.e., the voice of passers-by, local people, institutional practitioners, social workers, citizens, and city users)
 - c) Identification of expectations and attributions
 - d) Representations and symbolizations (i.e., artwork, mottos, and key words)
- 2) It also entails emotions, relationships, representations, attributes, and management of power and its action, in both the treatment of individual cases and the management of institution-ordered interventions
 - 3) It is specifically concerned with groups: group facilitation and inquiries through focus groups (Procentese & Arcidiacono, 2016) and participatory think tanks (Arcidiacono et al., 2012).

Small-group managerial skills are therefore found among the competencies of community psychologists. They are "crucial since most of our interventions, from action research to program planning and evaluation, from consultation to empowering organizations and communities, are very often done in small groups" (Francescato & Zani, 2013, p. 3). Psychological knowledge is thus acknowledged within the facilitation, directions, organization, and planning of group activities, and in this, psychology competencies facilitate and promote the participatory processes. Furthermore, the knowledge involved in the psychological vision joins that of the construction of collective bonds and interactions. Community psychologists are experts on the relationship between individuals and contexts while working as catalysts for social change (Arcidiacono, 2013).

This leads to the importance in community psychology of interventions for society, judiciary systems, and family and couple relationships. However, the question is whether only community psychologists have this competence. Obviously, the answer is negative. However, I would ask, "What is the community psychologists' unique competence?" I use the concept of uniqueness, attributing to CPs the specific peculiarity of the ability to fit knowledge of the inner individual world to social issues, to connect feelings and places; emotions and organizations; and individual well-being and social settings. In fact, the psychological basic training that develops such competencies act as a tool to increase the social understanding and effectiveness of actions. Therefore, it is not enough to point out that CPs are trained in specific competences; they use the following:

- Participatory multi-faceted organizational assessment (PMOA), used to promote empowerment and organizational well-being. Here, participatory competencies gained by the future labs approach proposed by Stark (2012) are used to support workers in recognizing future aims and priorities for their organizational empowerment (Francescato & Zani, 2013; Francescato & Aber, 2015):
- Participatory community profiling, where contextual needs analysis is conducted with participatory procedures (Francescato & Zani, 2013; Arcidiacono et al., 2016; Arcidiacono, 2016).
- Participatory action research, where authors describe their specific participatory commitment (Brydon-Miller & Maguire, 2009; Bradbury, 2015; Arcidiacono et al., 2015).
- Communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), where their background in observational and relational skills makes a unique and distinctive contribution.

- Social change intervention and urban and environmental regeneration, where specific skills are competencies such as narrative interviews, photo-dialogues, visual tools, citizens' exhibitions, and urban regeneration procedures.
- This training is embedded in a theory and practice of social and individual interaction that makes CP professionals and researchers distinctive.

Values and method: The TRIP model

In an attempt to focus the core competencies of community psychologists in a different approach related to tasks as well as methodological knowledge and values, I detected the following dimensions, *trustfulness*, *reflexivity*, *intersectionality*, and *positionality*, and (in a joint workshop with Jacqui Ackurst at Rhodes University) named by its acronym this intertwined set of professional values and skills the TRIP model for community psychologists.

Trustfulness. The relational ethical perspective that CP pursues should lead professionals to create a setting of reciprocal trust and respect. Fairness, respect, and equality are reference points (Prilleltensky, 2012). These are specific features that increase professional effectiveness. It must, however, be pointed out that this is not related to a benevolent attitude but to the awareness that researchers in a trustful and participatory perspective need to have some specific skills related to interactional values. Among these, it is worth noting the importance of shared discussions about goals and strategies. The following proposed strategies and interactive skills require attention:

- 1) Restitution of results and discussion in a participatory way
- 2) Discussion and shared building of interventions and future actions

- 3) Data assessment and final participatory evaluation using qualitative and/or quantitative tools
- 4) Development of competencies in assessment, communication, and dissemination. (Arcidiacono, 2016)

Reflexivity. This is a central concept for post-modern science. It entails the skill to reflect on one's own attitudes, emotions, and feelings toward a specific task, goal, context, or interrelation. It highlights the fact that subjectivity is a tool in the research process to achieve new levels of understanding, especially within a qualitative approach to research. In our experience, reflexivity is a basic requirement for group facilitation, participatory actions, and empowerment. It is also a basic skill for qualitative research in psychology (Halin et al., 2008), developing interviewing competence and building competencies to conduct narrative interviews to discuss and improve the competence of researchers in using interviews (Freda, González-Monteaquedo, & Esposito, 2016; Arcidiacono, 2016; Arcidiacono et al., 2016a; Arcidiacono et al., 2016b).

Researchers' self-awareness in the context of research and reflecting on positioning, including power within social/political/historical contexts, is a distinguishing competence of a CP. Reyes Cruz and Sonn (2011) discuss it in detail using a cultural approach:

As critical community psychologists, we are particularly interested in a decolonizing standpoint to culture that can disrupt essentialist understandings of cultural matters that have served historically to marginalize others. This standpoint brings into clearer view ways in which power/privilege/oppression are reproduced and contested through racialized and ethnicized practices and discourses; that is, how

social inequality is maintained and challenged through culture. (p. 204)

Decolonizing, decolonization, and coscientization practices (Burton, 2015; Martin Barò, 1994; Reyes Cruz, & Sonn, 2011) have their basic support in reflective experience.

There is much talk about the need for researchers to produce appropriate remarks and interactions and to write good minutes, developing the researcher's reflexivity and turning it into shared knowledge. From this perspective, I wish to focus on this issue. Furthermore, reflexivity is a requirement for two additional skills: *positionality* and *intersectionality*. Indeed, skills in reflexivity will develop special competencies in regard to otherness and diversity, dealing with the aptitude to reflect on how the role and function to be performed influences his/her actions and how the otherness of the Other influences interrelation and social action, as the current text further examines. In fact, reflexivity is a major skill needed in dealing with differences.

Intersectionality is competence in conceptualizing the interrelationships of gender, class, race and ethnicity, and other social divisions. Feminist and community psychologist Michelle Fine (2015) wrote about intersectionality as a tool that promotes "new understandings of self and others" (p. 9). In the same vein, Nishida (2016) says "The concept of intersectionality is a way of understanding 'the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relationships and subject formations' (McCall, 2005, p. 1711). This intersectional framework enables the acknowledgment of our multiple identities as well as the ways in which various social injustices are intertwined and interactively affect our daily lives" (p. 1). More specifically, according to Okazaki and Saw (2011), psychology-community collaborative projects in research and social action may benefit from attending

systematically to three broad sets of cultural ecological dimensions: race and ethnicity, culture, and immigration and transnational ties. Fine and Ruglis (2008) give evidence for an intersectional approach when, using mainly ethnographic material, they describe how ideologies about merit, deservingness, and blame drip feed into the souls of black students and demonstrate the deep penetration of youth dispossession through state-sanctioned policies.

Positionality. This dimension is concerned with how any particular person is situated in relation to an issue and is sometimes referred to as “standpoint epistemology” (Kagan et al., 2011). This is not only a theoretical stance, as the development of specific competencies is required. A researcher should be concerned about the following:

- How he/she writes memos and notes
- How he/she carries out observational tasks (ethnographical or clinical approach)
- How he/she carries out interviews and interacts with people and groups

This competence is distinctively enhanced by the psychological training that has as a main goal self-questioning about feelings, thoughts, and desires concerning self and others and developing self- and social awareness as well as listening competencies. It develops observation, listening, interpreting, and decision-making competencies as core skills. The clinical and psychotherapeutic background is useful.

All the aforementioned competencies enact social transformative practices to create

processes of co-creation of contexts which enable the widening of frames of signification, as well as of affective, cognitive and action areas. (When we refer to ‘transformative social practices’ we mean community approach, systemic facilitation, psychotherapy etc.). Taken together

these practices operate on three planes of action/reflexivity: the pragmatic, the relational and the symbolic, which operate both as the context and the operational field at the same time. (Fuks, 2016, p. 44)

A further description of the TRIP model will be available in Arcidiacono (2017, in preparation).

CP psychologist as a “collaborative, reflective plumber”

In 2012, during my undergraduate community psychology course, I held what I named a Drawing-voice¹ Workshop, aimed at the acquisition of and reflection on the basic elements of the community psychology approach. The workshop was geared to students, with a particular focus on critical perspective, action research, and participatory action research. The workshop consisted of the following phases: a) creation of five-member groups to analyze educational content, mainly “what it means to you to be a psychologist”; b) discussion of preliminary findings in another grouping; c) drawing-focused key points; d) discussion about them in the classroom one more time; e) posting all drawings and beginning dialogues on Facebook; f) discussion through reciprocal comments; and g) development of an inter-group dialogue outside the classroom through a self-run Facebook group.

The purpose was to deconstruct, negotiate, and reconstruct the meaning that young people today attribute to the role of the psychologist in modern society in regard to their expectations and educational path. The collective work was created by drawing

¹ Drawing-voice is an important supportive tool for defining conceptual dimensions through graphic representations and web sharing. It also provides the opportunity to share meanings and co-construct new viewpoints to bring about transformational and developmental practices (Arcidiacono & Carnevale in preparation).

several pictures and finally reached the symbolization of the community psychologist as “a plumber” (see Fig. 1). I was very surprised and inquired about the reasons for this metaphoric representation and they answered,

A community psychology researcher is like a plumber. His/her competence is to observe, think, and question, sometimes facing difficult situations. The CPs should be a watchful eye, always aware of contexts, emotions, and, above all, relations that are approached. (Arcidiacono & Carnevale, 2014)

They always have a toolbox, which differs from that of a carpenter or an electrician, so it is specific. Then, from a constructivist and systemic perspective, features were revealed as those of a profession capable of: 1) discovering, understanding, and then intervening and 2) conducting a needs analysis of the context, building and evaluating the best solution to propose and act upon. I would add here that he/she would be a “special plumber” because, unlike a normal plumber, the CP does not repair the broken pipe but calls in the owners and gives them the tools and the skills to repair it together.



Figure 1: *The reflective psychologist* (Arcidiacono & Carnevale, 2014)

Further specific competencies include dealing with intermediating and intermediate factors, as Brett Kloos and colleagues pointed out, emphasizing that special skills are needed in the intervention at the meso level (Kloos et

al., 2012; Kloos, 2016). Social workers are generally active in research and with individuals, but not especially in the interactions among groups and institutions. Community psychologists are instead expert

in networking, building up communal knowledge, and sharing visions of different stakeholders. They are trained in relational and evaluation competencies, linking persons beyond an individual level. Moreover, their actions enable better functioning of institutions to respond to the demand of the people.

Community psychologist as second- (meta-) level expert

Our psychological background allows us to link different knowledge, thereby making the community psychologist a type of “second-level” expert. Community psychologists, when constructing relations between different levels, such as in the ecologic model, actually place themselves as professionals at a meta level, which allows them to see through different levels and their reciprocal interaction. This is a competence that some may call *linking science* (Stark, 2012), but in reality, it has its roots in the foundations of the aforementioned systemic approach. A competency unique to the community psychologist is the ability to help integrate the internal, social, relational, and cultural worlds in the strong framework of values that characterizes it. This further level of knowledge does not line up other different traditional disciplines in a row (psychology, sociology, organizational science, anthropology, art, educational science, social work, and social medicine), nor does it simply connect academics and practice or the past with the future in a prefigurative praxis (Burton, 2015). Rather, it refers to a systemic professional competency of a further level of meta-knowledge.

We have, in fact, much more: a global multidimensional view and transdisciplinary sensitivity toward the interaction of specific knowledge, procedural methodologies, relational tools, and practical techniques, which all characterize our discipline as meta-knowledge. We all eat, but we are not all theoretical or methodological experts in food

science; we all talk, but we are not all scholars of language and communication, etc. It is right in their meta-dialogue competencies that community psychologists distinguish themselves from the activist or, the social worker. Hence, CPs are psychologists with a critical, systemic, and ecological approach to human behaviors and diseases.

It is true that some of our competencies can be shared with other professionals; however, community psychologists’ action has specific hallmarks: an ecological perspective, a systemic approach to knowledge, and the ability to work and deal with both the inner world of individuals and group factors. Furthermore, our competencies include the basic knowledge required to enable individual dimensions (i.e., emotion and motivation) to interact with social determinants, as well as to deal with individual and social representations, stereotypes, attribution, and prejudices. Community psychologists are professionals who seek to tap into people’s minds and hearts collecting their mental representations of places and contexts in order to act together and make them arenas for justice, democracy, and togetherness. We can conclude that the major skill of community psychologists is the ability to analyze and intervene at the border between individual and social features. Some of their competencies are shared with other professionals, but what makes them unique is the knowledge to deal with the mirroring of social events in individual lives and vice versa. In light of all this, the need to show our specificity as a discipline is significant and deserves all our attention. The current article sheds some light on this issue and supports community psychologists in better promoting their work and giving value to their competencies.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Dr. Serena Dinelli from the Rome Bateson circle for our fruitful discussions during the inception and

throughout the writing of this article as well as to PhD Dr. Salvatore Di Martino (Leeds Beckett University) and Dr. Francesca Esposito (ISPA, Lisbon) for their precious suggestions and supporting advice.

References

- Arcidiacono, C., & Carnevale, S. (2014). Active learning methodology and promotion of learning communities with the support of virtual tools. In: *Community psychology in the current world: Challenges, limits and practices*, 5CIPC Fortaleza, Abstract book, Fortaleza, Brazil.
- Arcidiacono, C., & Di Martino, S. (2012). Psicologia della liberazione e psicologia critica di comunità come conquista di felicità, libertà ed equità. *Psicologia di Comunità*, 1, 67–80.
- Arcidiacono, C., & Di Martino, S. (2016a). A critical analysis of happiness and well-being. Where we stand now, where we need to go. *Community Psychology in Global Perspective*, 2(1), 6–35.
- Arcidiacono, C., Grimaldi, D., Di Martino, S., & Procentese, F. (2016b). Participatory visual methods in the 'Psychology Loves Porta Capuana' project. *Action Research*, (first online), DOI: 10.1177/1476750315626502 .
- Arcidiacono, C., Natale, A., & Carbone, A. (2012). Thinktank di ricerca per l'integrazione e la convivenza tra autoctoni e immigrati africani. In D. Giovannini & L. Vezzali (Eds.), *Immigrazione, processi interculturali e cittadinanza attiva* (pp. 85–94). Caserta, Italy: Melagrana.
- Arcidiacono, C., Tuozi, T., & Procentese, F. (2016a). Community profiling in participatory action research. In L.A. Jason & D.S. Glenwick (Eds.), *Handbook of methodological approaches to community based research: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods* (pp. 355-364). New York, NY: Oxford University.
- Amerio, P. (2000). *Psicologia di comunità*. Bologna: Il mulino.
- Bateson, G. (1972). *Steps to an ecology of mind*. London, UK: Jason Aronson Inc.
- Bosio, A.C., & Lozza, E. (2013). Professionalizzazione della psicologia e professioni psicologiche. Il percorso e le prospettive in Italia. *Giornale Italiano di Psicologia*, XL(4), 675–690.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Brydon-Miller, M., & Maguire, P. (2009). Participatory action research: Contributions to the development of practitioner inquiry in education. *Educational Action Research*, 17(1), 79-93.
- Burton, M. (2015). Economy and planet: A blind spot for community psychology? *Universitas Psychologica*, 14(4), 15–21.
- Burton, M., & Kagan, C. (2005). Liberation social psychology: Learning from Latin America. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 15(1), 63–78.
- Christens, B., & Perkins, D.D. (2008). Transdisciplinary, multilevel action research to enhance ecological and psychopolitical validity. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 36(2), 214–231.
- Dalton, J., & Wolfe, S. (2012). Joint column: Education connection and the community practitioner. *The Community Psychologist*, 45(4), 8–14.
- Elias, M.J., Neigher, W.D., & Johnson-Hakim, S. (2015). Guiding principles and competencies for community psychology. In V.C. Scott & S. Wolfe (Eds.), *Community psychology foundations for practice* (pp. 35–62). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Fals Borda, O. (2001). Participatory (action) research in social theory. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *Handbook of action research: Participative Inquiry and practice* (pp. 27–37). London, UK: SAGE Publications.
- Fals, Borda, O. (1979). The problem of investigating reality in order to transform it. *Dialectical Anthropology*, 4(1), 33–56.
- Fine, M. (2015). Glocal provocations: Critical reflections on community based research and intervention designed at the (glocal) intersections of the global dynamics and local cultures. *Community Psychology in Global Perspective*, 1(1), 5–15.
- Fine, M., & Ruglis, J. (2008). Circuits of dispossession: The racialized and classed realignment of the public sphere for youth in the U.S. *Transforming Anthropology*, 17(1), 20–33.
- Francescato, D., & Aber, M. (2015). Learning from organizational theory to build organizational empowerment. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 43(6), 717–738.
- Francescato, D., & Zani, B. (2013). Community psychology practice competencies in undergraduate and graduate programs in Italy. *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice*, 4(4), 1–12. Retrieved from: <http://www.gjcpp.org/>
- Freda, M.F., González-Monteagudo, G., & Esposito, G. (Eds.) (2016). *Working with underachieving students in higher education: Fostering inclusion through narration and reflexivity*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books.
- Fuks I. (2016). Riflessioni intorno alle crisi e alle opportunità di cui sono permeati i processi collettivi partecipativi. *Riflessioni sistemiche*, 14, 41–57.
- Hanlin, C.E., Bess, K., Conway, P., Evans, S.D., McCown, D., Prilleltensky, I., & Perkins D.D. (2008). Community psychology. In C. Willig & W. Stainton-Rogers (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in psychology* (pp. 524–540). London: SAGE.
- Jason, L.A. (1991). Participating in social change: A fundamental value for our discipline. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 19, 1–16.
- Kelly, J.G. (1986). Context and process: An ecological view of the interdependence of practice and research. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 14, 581–589.
- Kelly, J.G. (2006). *Becoming ecological: An expedition into community psychology*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Kloos, B. (2016). Community psychology as linking agent: Creating roles for mesosystem interventions. 6th ICCP Conference, SA University, 28–30 May, Durban, SA.
- Kloos, B., Hill, J., Thomas, E., Wandersman, A., Elias, M.J., & Dalton, J.H. (2012). *Community psychology: Linking individuals and communities: Linking individuals and communities* (3rd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Lewin, K. (1936). *Principles of topological psychology*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Martín-Baró, I. (1994). *Writings for a liberation psychology*. (A. Aron & S. Corne, Eds.). Boston, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Monteiro, R., Campos, I., & Figueiredo, C. (2016). Community psychology: Complexity, politics and subjectivity. 6th ICCP Conference, 28–30 May, SA University, Durban.

- Montero, M., & Sonn, C.C. (2009). *Psychology of liberation. Theory and applications*. New York, NY: Springer Science+Business Media.
- Natale, A., Arcidiacono, C. & Di Martino, S. (2013). From "Gomorra domain" to "Don Peppe Diana lands." A southern Italian experience of work-based liberation, community networking, and well-being. *Universitas Psychologica, 12*(4), 1037-1047.
- Natale, A., Di Martino, S., Procentese, F., & Arcidiacono, C. (2016). De-growth and critical community psychology: Contributions towards individual and social well-being. *Futures, 78-79*, 47-56.
- Neigher, W.D., Ratcliffe, A.W., Wolff, T., Elias, M., & Hakim, S.M. (2012). Value proposition for community psychology. *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice, 2*(3), 1-21.
- Nishida, A. (2016). Understanding political development through an intersectionality framework: Life stories of disability activists, *Disabilities Studies Quarterly, 36*(2), 1-3.
- Nussbaum, M., & Sen, A. (Eds.) (1993). *The quality of life*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.
- Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Creating capabilities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Orford, J. (2008). *Community psychology: Challenges, controversies and emerging consensus*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley.
- Okazaki, S., & Saw, A. (2011). Culture in Asian American community psychology: Beyond the East-West binary press. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 47*, 144-156.
- Prilleltensky, I. (2001). Value-based praxis in community psychology: Moving toward social justice and social action. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 29*(5), 747-778.
- Prilleltensky, I. (2008). The role of power in wellness, oppression, and liberation: the promise of psycho-political validity. *Journal of Community Psychology, 36*(2), 116-136.
- Prilleltensky, I. (2012). Wellness as fairness. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 49*(1-2), 1-21.
- Reich, S., Riemer, M., Prilleltensky, I., & Montero, M. (Eds.). (2007). *International community psychology. History and theories*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Reyes Cruz, M., & Sonn, C.C. (2011). (De)colonizing culture in community psychology: reflections from critical social science. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 47*(1-2), 203-214.
- Schön, D.A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Stark, W. (2012). Community psychology as linking science. *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice, 3*(1), 42-49. Retrieved from: <http://www.gjcpp.org/>
- Vazquez Rovera, C. (Ed.) (2010). *International community psychology. Shared agendas in diversity*. San Juan, PR: CIREC, University of Puerto Rico.
- von Bertalanffy, L. (1968). *General system theory. Development, applications*. New York, NY: George Braziller.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge, UK: University Press.

Wolfe, S.M., Chien-Scott, V., & Jimenez, T.R.
(2013). Community psychology practice
competencies: A global perspective.
*Global Journal of Community Psychology
Practice*, 4(4), 1-9. Retrieved from:
<http://www.gjcpp.org/>

Zani, B. (2016). IARSLCE (The International
Association for Research on Service-
Learning and Community Engagement),
Italian Network Conference, Università di
Bologna, 10 giugno, Bologna. Retrieved
from: <https://europeengage.org/>