

## Community-researcher liaisons: the Pathways to Resilience Project Advisory Panel

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*The Pathways to Resilience Project is an ongoing, community-based participatory research (CBPR) project. Its express focus is the exploration of how at-risk youths use formal services and/or informal, naturally occurring resources to beat the odds that have been stacked against them, with the intent of partnering with communities to promote youth resilience. As part of this exploration, project researchers partnered with representatives of participating communities, or advisory panels (AP). However, in literature documenting the worth of participatory methodologies in knowledge generation and social change, there is little mention of how partnerships with AP support communities build on existing knowledge to effect meaningful change. Therefore, the aim of this article is to report the instrumental case study of the AP to the South African Pathways to Resilience Project, between 2008 and the present, in order to foreground the research-informing, knowledge-generating, and practice-shaping value of collaboration with an AP. Simultaneously, this case showcases the complexity of AP-researcher partnerships in order to sensitise CBPR researchers to the need for reflexive, flexible cooperations if communities are to cogenerate and implement local knowledge in enabling ways.*

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In a country such as South Africa, where many children are repeatedly made vulnerable by a myriad of psychosocial and economic threats, researchers have a pressing responsibility to engage in research that potentiates a deeper understanding of children's resilience or positive adjustment to significant threats. Understanding resilience is not enough in and of itself, however. Ideally, researchers need to use such understanding to partner with children and communities to promote resilience in contextually aligned ways (Masten, 2011; Ungar, 2011). This is easier said than done because resilience is a complex, dynamic process that varies across spatial, cultural, and temporal contexts. As such, it is very dangerous to assume that definitions of, and explanations for, resilience are constant or that Eurocentric or North American understandings sufficiently explain resilience in developing contexts (Bottrell, 2009; Ebersöhn, Eloff, Finestone, Dulleman, Sikkema & Forsyth, 2012; Mampane & Bower, 2011). One consequence of the changeability of resilience across contexts is the need for researchers to foreground local communities' and children's voices in how resilience is defined, studied, reported, and advocated (Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009; Masten, 2011; Theron, 2012). Put more simply, to truly understand and promote

resilience, CBPR approaches are key.

Many resilience-focused researchers have responded to the need for local communities to shape resilience research and have adopted CBPR approaches (e.g. Norris, Sherrieb & Pfefferbaum, 2011; Prince-Embury, 2013; Shetgiri, Kataoka, Ryan, Askew, Chung & Schuster, 2009). In some instances (e.g. Cameron, Theron, Ungar & Liebenberg, 2012; Didkowsky, Ungar & Liebenberg 2010; Theron & Dunn, 2010; Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011; 2013), CBPR approaches have included invitations to community representatives (from the communities in which the research took place) to partner in the research process. Such local partners were then known as a community advisory board (CAB) or AP. Although the range of AP involvement can potentially be extensive, AP involvement is typically limited to advisory oversight of research projects, with emphasis on implementation or procedural issues (Pinto, Spector & Valera, 2011). Mertens (2009:104) envisages an AP that could (should) “frame the research/evaluation and identify appropriate interventions, implement the intervention, interpret results, and provide implications for follow-up actions”. Her vision emphasises the potential of APs to be much more than advisers. In such more meaningful partnerships, LaFrance and Crazy Bull (2009) stress the collaborative nature of AP/researcher interaction, but caution that APs have little authority (if any) over researchers. In an effort to foreground the cooperative potential of truly participatory engagement with APs, Pinto et al. (2011:1006) prefer the term “Community Collaborative Board” (CCB) over AP or CAB.

When APs and research teams work symbiotically, community-based participatory (CBP) researchers associate multiple benefits with APs. These include elevated community support of research agendas and active endorsement of, and participation in, concomitant intervention activities, culturally responsive research procedures and interventions, increased researcher and community knowledge and use of local resources, and skill acquisition/enhancement among AP members (Jurkowski, Green Mills, Lawson, Bovenzi, Quartimon & Davison, 2013). CBP researchers also connect multiple challenges with APs. Mostly, these relate to the complexities of establishing genuine AP/researcher partnerships, tensions around financial resource control and budgetary expenditure, community partners’ stereotypical views of researchers and vice versa, and divergent objectives (e.g. building community infrastructure versus research-based publications) (Freeman, Brugge, Bennett-Bradley, Levy & Rivera Carrasco, 2006; Pinto et al., 2011; Silvestre, Quinn & Rinaldo, 2010). Israel, Krieger, Vlahov, Ciske, Foley, Fortin, Guzman, Lichtenstein, McGranaghan, Palermo and Tang (2006) also reported the difficulty of sustaining partnerships, often because of inadequate time and resources and associated risks.

A review of resilience studies that report APs (Cameron et al., 2012; Didkowsky et al., 2010; Fourie & Theron, 2012; Theron & Dunn, 2010; Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011) suggests that community partners generally did not participate substantively enough to be considered CCBs: APs typically only recommended suitable participants

and/or facilitated researcher entry to the community. Furthermore, these studies make no mention of the benefits and/or drawbacks of APs, even though such knowledge has the potential to meaningfully shape studies of resilience in ways that will support communities' capacity to conceptualise and promote resilience.

Thus, the current article aims to report the instrumental case (Creswell, 2012) of an ongoing engagement with the AP collaborating with the Pathways to Resilience Project (P2RP), South Africa. Although the Pathways Project focused on understanding resilience more deeply, this article does not report the resilience-related findings. Instead, this article summarises the process of researcher collaboration with an AP, as a form of CBPR, and comments on the complexities of AP/researcher partnerships. The purpose of providing such a précis is to make clear how much more an AP can do than merely advise researchers and how important it is that researchers have respect for advisory panel members (APMs) as co-researchers<sup>1</sup> (Mertens, 2009; Pinto et al., 2011). A detailed delineation of this engagement potentiates lessons for resilience-focused researchers (also in education contexts) that could shape contextually relevant and community-partnered enquires into, and promotion of, resilience. More generally, this delineation is potentially instructive to CBP researchers who strive towards engagement with CCBs (rather than APs).

### **The case of the AP-P2RP collaboration**

#### **Methodology informing the presentation of the case**

The following synopsis of the AP-P2RP collaboration draws on multiple forms of qualitative data generated in the longitudinal course of the AP-P2RP engagement. These data include meeting minutes and transcripts, my (i.e. the principal South African investigator's) research diary, visual records (e.g. photographs, video footage), AP-generated artefacts (e.g. clay models, drawings), and official P2RP evaluation reports (2010, 2011). In accordance with ethical principles, APMs provided permission for the above (including photographs) to be made public. To make sense of these vast data and to theorise what lessons they hold for other CBPR researchers wishing to engage with an AP, I employed content analysis (Creswell, 2012). I invited two current APMs to critically review the content of this article and my theorising. I also provided all current APMs with a copy during an AP-P2RP meeting held on 24 June 2013 and invited their feedback.

#### **Background to the collaboration**

The South African P2RP is part of a larger, CBPR, five-country P2RP that is investigating the formal service and informal pathways of young people who adjust well to significant adversity, with the aim of harnessing this knowledge to promote young people's resilience processes (see [www.resilienceresearch.org](http://www.resilienceresearch.org) for detail regarding the greater project). In 2008, P2RP researchers were funded to develop the research proposal in collaboration with local communities. This proposal was successful, and the study officially commenced in 2009, with termination projected as end 2014. The

inclusion of an AP across all research sites was mandated by the project design, supported by local communities who helped shape the research agenda, and encouraged by the funders. AP composition and the nature of the AP's functioning were at the discretion of each country's principal investigator.

### Composition of the AP

The SA P2RP researchers extended invitations for AP membership based on the following criteria: (i) adults living in the communities where the P2RP research would be conducted (i.e. residence in the Thabo Mofutsanyana district – specifically the Bethlehem and QwaQwa areas – Free State province); (ii) vocational engagement that included daily, meaningful interaction with the local youth; and (iii) willingness to be an active AP member for the duration of the project (i.e. attend AP meetings; advise the research team on culturally congruent and ethical research practice; support conceptualisation of local resilience; support recruitment of youth participants; and guide dissemination).

A P2RP researcher, who had lived in the Bethlehem area for an extensive period, extended the invitations on behalf of the P2RP. He had previously worked closely with the local youth and was, therefore, well acquainted with adults who fitted the above criteria. Moreover, his insider status and popularity with community members facilitated positive responses to most of the invitations. Of the 11 invitations extended between August 2008 and January 2009, eight community members accepted.

In total, 14 community members, representing a variety of youth-focused services, have served on the AP (see Table 1). For varying reasons (summarised in Table 1), AP membership has been fluid. The current (2013) AP consists of six members; only two of which have been involved in the P2RP since its inception.

### Partnership process

The chronological process of partnering is summarised visually in Figure 1.

In the **exploratory phase**, original APMs were asked to consider what value there might be in their partnering with P2RP researchers (without remuneration), with particular reference to the envisaged aims of the P2RP. They were also asked to comment on preliminary project design ideas and locally relevant dissemination strategies. All were in favour of a project that would explore the resilience processes of local youths, partly because they were so tired of researchers highlighting what was wrong with the local youth and partly because of the pressing need for knowledge that might support service providers (including educators) to champion youth resilience in culturally relevant ways; e.g. APM 1 commented:

*What is going to happen to him [a vulnerable child she was talking about] is that through this project we are going to go closer to him, because...everybody is having the resources but they don't know how to make use of the resources, how to handle this child, how to make him to bounce back, it is only this project and what we learn that is going to help this child to bounce back.*

**Table 1** AP composition

| Advisory panel member (APM) | Affiliation                                     | Sex    | Race  | Active on AP                                | Reason for interrupted/ Disrupted participation                           |
|-----------------------------|---|--------|-------|---|---|
| APM 1                       | Department of Education (DoE):<br>local teacher | Female | Black | Aug 2008 – present                          |   |
| APM 2                       | Youth Motivation Agency                         | Male   | Black | Aug 2008 – Jan 2010                         | Deceased  |
| APM 3                       | Child-focused Non-government Organisation (NGO) | Male   | Black | Sept 2009 – Jan 2011                        | Work pressure   |
| APM 4                       | Child-focused NGO                               | Male   | Black | Sept 2009 – Sept 2012                       | Left NGO; work pressure in new position prevented continued participation |
| APM 5                       | Child Welfare                                   | Male   | White | Aug 2008 – present                          |   |
| APM 6                       | Child Welfare                                   | Female | White | Sept 2009 – Jan 2010                        | Emigrated   |
| APM 7                       | Child Welfare                                   | Male   | Black | Jan 2010 – Dec 2011                         | Relocated to a different province, following promotion                    |
| APM 8                       | Child Welfare                                   | Female | Black | Jan 2010 – present                          | Often absent from AP meetings because of work pressure                    |
| APM 9                       | Department of Social Development                | Female | Black | Sept 2009 – Jan 2010;<br>Jan 2011 – present | Maternity leave prevented participation for most of 2010                  |
| APM 10                      | DoE: District Support Services                  | Male   | White | Aug 2008 – Jan 2011                         | Retirement and ill health   |
| APM 11                      | DoE: District Support Services                  | Male   | Black | Aug 2010 – present                          |   |
| APM 12                      | DoE: District Support Services                  | Female | White | Feb 2011 – present                          |   |
| APM 13                      | Faith-based organisation                        | Male   | Black | Aug 2008 – Sept 2009                        | Ill health (but continued to support participant recruitment)             |
| APM 14                      | Child-focused NGO                               | Male   | Black | Sept 2011 – Dec 2012                        | Relocation to different province  |

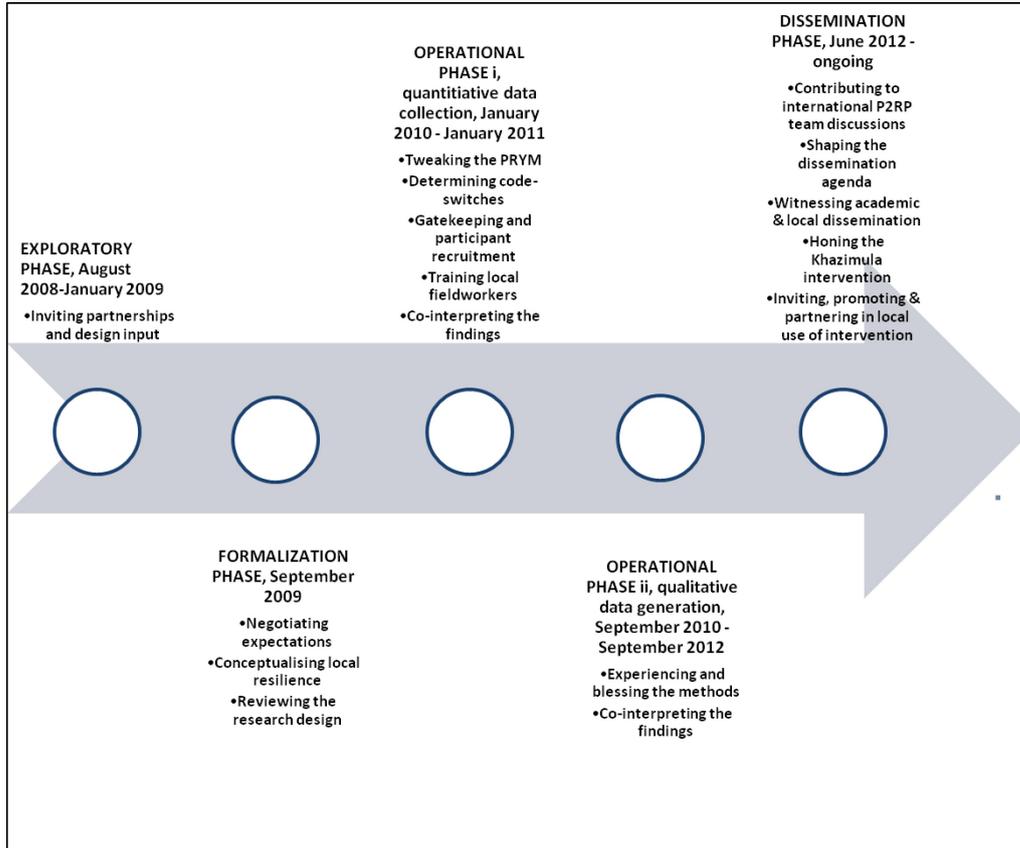


Figure 1 Timeline of partnership process

Consulted community members were confident that the local youth would cope with a mixed-methods design that included surveys in English, but prompted group-based qualitative data generation to fit with the socialisation processes of the local youth (see Theron & Malindi, 2012:100). Members were not in favour of a paper-based dissemination of research findings (as suggested in the preliminary design). They were quite adamant that, in their community, with its high rates of poverty and illiteracy, researchers needed to “break bread” (see Elias & Theron, 2012:148) with community members and explain research findings in readily understandable, informally interactive, and nurturing (also physically) ways. Respect for this wisdom was reflected in how the budget for the SA P2RP was structured to accommodate informal, interactive disseminations around shared refreshments. The final P2RP research design also emphasised that individual sites would generate qualitative data and disseminate findings in contextually responsive and responsible ways. Each AP member received a copy of the final project design as written up in the funding proposal.

In the **formalising phase**, P2RP researchers met with all community members who had consented to collaborate as AP members and clarified role expectations. In addition to ethical issues of mutual respect and confidentiality, the researchers and AP negotiated and minuted what active AP collaboration (as outlined earlier under the criterion of active participation) would ideally entail. This included agreement on only two formal AP-P2RP meetings per annum and regular informal (telephonic, or electronic, or small group) contact in-between. The researchers were emphatic that the AP needed to co-own the project, and the AP seemed eager to do so. In this regard, it was interesting that, during the 2010 P2RP evaluation, APM 4 commented: “*We [AP and P2RP team] work hand in glove ... to date, I believe we own this project.*”

In an exploration of AP expectations of the researchers, it emerged that, in addition to usable knowledge on how to promote local youths’ resilience, the AP hoped for formal recognition in the form of annual, university-endorsed certificates confirming their service to the project. As a consequence, awarding APMs with certificates takes place annually and as far as possible publically, in the presence of multiple community representatives.

Researchers and the AP also formally revisited the project’s aims and design. Because of the AP’s advice, the decision was made not to translate the Pathways to Resilience Measure (PRYM) – the quantitative measuring instrument chosen by the grant holder to be completed by youth participants across all five countries – but to agree on apposite Sesotho code-switches for more difficult English concepts. In both the formal minutes and in the Principal Investigator’s (PI’s) research diary, there was reference to the AP’s ready endorsement of the design, along with a diarised reflection that the AP’s:

*positive response to the aim/design and the expectation that they are integral to large-scale participant recruitment might be because they’ve been in on this [the design] from the start (and hopefully not because of the usual power issues between university researchers and community members).*

The one exception pertained to youth participants' compensation. The AP was unequivocal that, unlike in the other participating countries, the local youth could not receive a cash stipend, partly because adults could demand the money, or it could be stolen, or youths might spend it unwisely. Agreement was reached that youths would receive a meal from any local fast food vendor. This was honoured throughout the project (see Figure 2). In the formal 2011 external evaluation of the P2RP, APMs were invited to submit anonymous comments on their experience of being formally involved in the project. Two comments, in particular, testified to continued honouring of AP suggestions: "Our inputs are being taken seriously" and "We receive fulltime consultation, even telephonically, and we are part of decision making, which is important to us".



Figure 2 On the advice of the AP, participants received a Steers meal in gratitude for their participation<sup>2</sup>

Finally, as part of the formalisation process, the AP and researchers began to cogenerate a locally relevant understanding of resilience (see Theron, Theron & Malindi, 2013, for a full description of this process and for a detailed explanation of

local knowledge of resilience). Besides the theoretical value of formally challenging generic conceptualisations of resilience, this indigenous and locally relevant understanding informed youth participant recruitment to the project. This obviated reliance on western-produced indicators of resilience, thereby heightening the validity of the research process (Bottrell, 2009).

In the **first operational phase**, the AP partnered with P2RP researchers and students in a number of ways. In an intense, face-to-face, day-long meeting, the AP scrutinised the PRYM. APMs often recommended that wording be simplified or that local jargon replace typically American concepts (e.g. “skip school” was replaced with “bunk”). They were adamant that references to parents become parents/caregivers, given the high incidence of orphaned local youths. They had long discussions around the cultural acceptability of questions pertaining to dating and sexual behaviour and insisted that questions around cultural resources be extended to include traditional healers. In short, the AP ensured that the PRYM was adapted meaningfully for use with the local youth. In the formal 2011 evaluation, one APM member offered the following anonymous comment on this process:

*There is a sense of ownership in the project because we are given enough chance to give our inputs regarding the kinds of questions which are suitable for the children in our areas (based on age, background of the children).*

Later, Sesotho-speaking APMs met to reach consensus about the most appropriate code-switches. APMs also nominated three literate, unemployed community members to be trained by P2RP researchers as fieldworkers to assist in the administration of the PRYM and be remunerated for this. Depending on their professional affiliations, APMs facilitated relevant ethical permissions for the P2RP and provided access to school-attending, service-dependent, and resilient youth (as per the criteria generated by the AP – see Theron et al., 2013). Such gatekeeping often demanded more than providing introductions to potential participants: APMs often voluntarily telephoned youths to remind them of pre-arranged research dates, or transported youths to meet with researchers, and/or followed up with youth participants on their experiences of completing the PRYM. APMs expressed pride because of this involvement; e.g. APM 3 commented:

*As [name of NGO] we are happy because we were given opportunity to organise children, close to the suggested n of 200, thus we felt [we were] owning the project because we arranged everything for the project to be [a] success.*

The AP also partnered in the interpretation of the findings. Postgraduate P2RP students orally presented the quantitative results at the formal annual AP-P2RP meetings, along with summary reports of implicit understandings of local youths’ pathways to resilience and potential lessons for community members towards effective support of local youth resilience. The AP extended the interpretations insightfully; e.g. APM 7 suggested the need to reconsider how the resilience processes of local youths were related to their living arrangements, something the P2RP researchers had not consi-

dered and that yielded significant insights, once investigated.

Because of the AP's earlier cautioning against one-on-one qualitative methods, the P2RP considered participatory visual methods that were suited to group settings. These included the Draw-and-write Method (Mitchell, Theron, Stuart, Smith & Campbell, 2011), the Mmogo-method<sup>TR</sup> (Roos, 2008), and Participatory Video (Mitchell, Milne & De Lange, 2012). In the **second operational phase**, APMs experimented with these methods (see Figure 3) during specially arranged AP-P2RP meetings. Using their lived experiences of these methods, the AP endorsed their use with the youth in the P2RP. APMs also noted the value of these methods to their own future service to the youth and concluded that they had been "*up-skilled*" (in the words of APM 11). Some also commented on the serendipitous therapeutic value the experience of trialling the methods had had; e.g. APM 9 reflected that the opportunity "[gave] me some therapy so I think this is a good thing that you [researchers] did, so thank you!"



Figure 3 APM 1 experimenting with the Mmogo-method<sup>TR</sup>

As in the first operational phase, APMs actively facilitated access to youth participants and arranged venues where researchers and youths could meet for lengthy periods without being disturbed. During the Mmogo sessions in Bethlehem, APM 1 was often present as a non-participant observer, as was APM 11 in QwaQwa (see

Figure 4). The AP also recommended local unemployed adults to be trained to help with (and be remunerated for) transcription and translation of qualitative data sets.



Figure 4 APM 11 observes QwaQwa youths in a Mmogo session

Again, as in the previous phase, the postgraduate P2RP students presented the findings emerging from the qualitative data sets to the AP and provided APMs with copies of the findings. Once again, the AP contributed rich insight, particularly in their pointing out of the “silences” in the data; e.g. both APMs 5 and 14 pointed out that fathers were largely absent from youth explanations of their resilience processes. The AP was excited by the findings, partly because these offered rich, useable understanding of local youths’ pathways to resilience and partly because APMs believed the findings, in conjunction with their association with the P2RP, offered experience and evidence that would compel policy makers and local government structures to heed their recommendations for youth support; e.g. APM 4 commented:

*Our learning through, uh, the project can be used an advocacy tool, because normally we attend the meetings of decision makers but they are not acting because there is no document ... so this learning from us as different stakeholders*

*is a learning where we will say we have learnt this and this and this, and this document tells you ... meaning that we can use this as an advocacy tool.*

APM 1 echoed this conclusion: *“It is only through this project that we could just tell them, teach them, that ‘OK guys, let’s do this. Here is the way of approaching this child’ when we give them feedback.”*

In the course of trialling the qualitative methods and considering findings, APMs became vocal about how engagement in the AP was also useful to them because it broadened their awareness that they were not isolated in their support of the youth. AP engagement reminded them formally and informally that there was a network of local youth-supporting adults and that they needed to synthesise their efforts. For instance, APM 9 retorted: *“There are so many children ... having problems ... but if we are working together I’ve realised that with all of us we can make a difference in their lives.”* APM 4 endorsed this: *“As different stakeholders we are together bringing hope to those children.”* The AP’s emphasis on the importance of a network of supportive systems to youths’ resilience was also evidenced in the drawings they made during their trialling of qualitative data generation tools (see Figure 5).

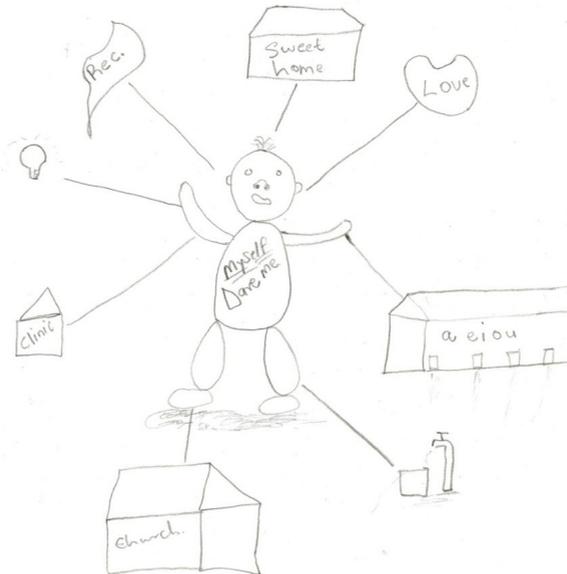


Figure 5 Resilience processes are embedded in multiple support systems

As in preceding phases, the AP shaped (and will continue to shape the ongoing) dissemination of the project's findings. They participated in the 2012 international P2RP five-country team meeting that was hosted by the South African (SA) P2RP team. Part of the focus of this meeting was to consider how best to disseminate findings, and APMs present emphasised the importance of oral dissemination and transformation of findings into practical guidelines for service providers. APMs 11 and 12 joined P2RP researchers and students at the 2012 International Congress of Psychology (ICP) and witnessed their invited panel dissemination of the P2RP's findings. APM 12 attended all the ICP sessions on resilience-related studies and produced a summary report of the findings flowing from other resilience projects and how these could be harnessed by the P2RP. APMs were also present at local community-focused disseminations to representatives of schools, NGOs, government services, children's homes, and churches and interacted informally with these representatives around how the findings could be used by community members to promote resilience meaningfully. Prior to this, they read and endorsed sample reports that were handed to community representatives to share with their organisations, but urged the addition of an executive summary (for service providers who would not have much time to read full reports).

Sesotho-speaking APMs helped name the resilience-supporting intervention (*Khazimula!* – meaning “Shine!”) that flowed from the project's findings. The name reflected the community's hope that, with support, their youth would (continue to) shine as well as APMs' strong belief that understanding and promoting resilience would bring light to youths and their community. APMs were strongly supportive of the theory of resilience that *Khazimula* advocated (see Theron, in press, for detail), but critical that the initial intervention did not include a toolkit of activities for teachers and service providers. APM 12 was particularly concerned that, without the addition of a toolkit, local teachers (who were already overworked) would interpret *Khazimula* as just another onerous task, rather than an opportunity to partner with the youth in resilience-supporting ways.

Finally, the AP was instrumental in inviting the P2RP team to train local service providers, teachers, and youth workers to use (the improved) *Khazimula* to support the local youth towards resilience. They also invited the P2RP researchers to attend local youth camps and implement *Khazimula* with needy youths and cooperated actively in the process. APM 12 and some of her colleagues have implemented *Khazimula* themselves on a number of occasions, both in training sessions of teacher groups and with youths themselves. APM 5 has included *Khazimula* in routine interactions at his shelter with street children.

Some of the above invitations were not without tense moments; e.g. when APMs and P2RP researchers visited schools to evaluate how some local teachers (trained to use *Khazimula*) were implementing *Khazimula* and to support improved implementation, these teachers thought they were being inspected and were, consequently, terribly

nervous. On one occasion, since they had participated in the Khazimula training, three local teachers expected to be included in a dinner being held to disseminate P2RP findings to community leaders. It is possible that because teachers were aware that P2R was a funded project, they expected to be rewarded for their participation in the dissemination phase, rather than interpreting their participation as an opportunity to learn how to use locally generated knowledge to promote local youths' resilience. Regardless of the reason, the APMs involved felt uncomfortable with the budgetary complications these expectations created for the P2RP.



Figure 6 APM 12 and a PhD student participating in Khazimula dissemination with local youths

### **Lessons learnt through the partnership process**

In this final section, I draw on the process documented above to comment on the rich value of partnering with an AP as well as the complexities of this process. The former highlights the multiple advantages that such a participatory partnership has for communities involved and researchers. The latter cautions researchers wanting to establish such partnerships that they need to be respectfully co-constructed and possibly re-negotiated as the project progresses.

### The value of collaborative partnerships with an AP

#### *Partnering with an AP cogenerates valuable indigenous theory*

In the case of the SA P2RP, AP/researcher partnerships made it possible to theorise a context-specific understanding of resilience. In so doing, local expert knowledge could be documented scientifically (see Theron et al., 2013). At the time of writing up this theory, no APM had time to co-author, and so the authorship task fell to the university-associated researchers. Nevertheless, the documentation of an indigenous understanding of resilience not only challenged hegemonic European-American understandings, but also meaningfully informed purposeful recruitment of youth participants. Thus, partnering with an AP has theoretical value, with potential concomitant empirical value.

#### *Partnering with an AP facilitates a credible, culturally and contextually responsive research process*

The AP's commitment to their advisory role was pragmatically valuable to the research process: quantitative and qualitative tools were adapted/piloted and endorsed – also in terms of their being culturally, developmentally, and contextually responsive; ethical permission processes were supported and expedited; participant recruitment was advanced; logistical arrangements for data generation were simplified; and interpretations of findings were refined. All of this was clearly valuable to the rigour of the research process (Creswell, 2012), but it also had value in the dissemination of project findings (as reported by Jurkowski et al., 2013 and Pinto et al., 2011). Knowing that an AP of locals had shaped and sanctioned the research process heightened community members' receptiveness to the project's findings.

#### *Partnering with an AP contributes APM and community reward*

As in other CBP projects that included APs, local communities benefited in the form of locally relevant knowledge and AP-refined interventions that flowed from the P2RP (Jurkowski et al., 2013; Pinto et al., 2011). Bethlehem and QwaQwa residents had access to these because APMs used their networks and positions to push dissemination products that emerged from the SA P2RP. APMs' active promotion might have been because they had honed dissemination products and/or because they had co-owned the research process that generated these products and/or because they had considered these products necessary from the project's inception (see the description of the exploratory phase). Whatever the reason, partnering with the AP meant that rather than research findings being narrowly used (i.e. only in academic publications), cogenerated knowledge was collaboratively transformed into an intervention for local community use.

Community benefit had indirect reward for all the APMs, given their service-oriented vocations. In addition, though, partnering in the P2RP benefited APMs in that they learned participatory techniques (e.g. drawings, Mmogo-method<sup>TR</sup>) that could be used in their interaction with youths and that they experienced as personally soothing.

Further reward related to their being reminded that they were a community of service providers and, therefore, not alone in the coterminous task of serving the local youth. For many APMs, however, the ultimate reward lay in documented, cogenerated research findings that would strengthen their advocacy for support of the local youth.

The challenge of collaborative partnerships with an AP

*Partnerships are organic*

What became clear in the course of the P2RP was the naivety of expecting APMs to partner for the duration of this six-year project. The reality of transitional life events and work pressures complicated sustained partnering (as also reported by Israel et al., 2006). Simultaneously, disrupted partnerships potentially strain the research process. Possibly, this points to the need to negotiate partnership terms (e.g. two years) in long-term projects, with the option of APMs serving for more than one term. If partnership terms are considered, then succession plans for APM's who cannot fulfil more than one term also need to be collaboratively considered.

However, partnerships are organic in other ways, too. AP and researcher expectations were clarified at the outset of the P2RP, and although the 2010 and 2011 evaluations investigated APMs' broad satisfaction with the project, the original expectations were never revisited. This oversight disrespects the APs' history of fluid membership, but also the strong possibility that expectations may have changed in the course of the project or that additional expectations (e.g. shared authorships, an AP-controlled budget for AP-directed dissemination, etc.) may have emerged. Recognition of this oversight challenges P2RP (and other) researchers to acknowledge and address changing partnerships by regularly revisiting and renegotiating expectations.

Finally, a challenge emerging from the case of the SA AP-P2RP partnership is how to extend this partnership to include other community stakeholders, particularly during the dissemination phase. I am thinking particularly of the isolated incidents of local teachers who seemed not to fully understand the youth- and community-focused dissemination objective of the AP-P2RP partnership. How could non-AP community members be included as dissemination agents in ways that promote continued use of project-generated interventions and, simultaneously, afford these members rewarding experiences (without violating project budget constraints)?

*Partnerships must share power*

True partnerships are egalitarian, but this is challenging in the actuality of AP-researcher partnerships; e.g. although it was important to honour AP expectations of formal, university-endorsed recognition of their service to the project, honouring this implicitly elevated the researchers. As university members, this positioned them as certificate bearers, whereas APMs were positioned as certificate recipients. One could argue that the power positions were reversed when researchers respected APMs' indigenous knowledge or recommendations relating to research and dissemination processes. Nevertheless, the challenge lies in reflectively operationalising the partner-

ship as a series of bidirectional give-and-take events in which partners take turns to lead. Only then might it not matter that APs have limited formal authority (LaFrance & Crazy Bull, 2009), as the reality is shared authority.

### Conclusion

Meaningful collaborations with an AP offer a pathway to communities to shape research processes and generate knowledge in culturally and contextually congruent ways. Such collaborations also potentiate avenues for communities to effect positive change when APs co-transform such knowledge into community-responsive interventions and actively promote community use of these. However, as seen in the case of the AP-P2RP partnership, for this potential to be realised, researcher flexibility and reflexivity are crucial, as is respect for the fluid nature of such partnerships.

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### Notes

- 1 From the case of the AP-researcher collaboration in the P2RP, it is apparent that APMs were indeed co-researchers. In this regard, I acknowledge the artificiality of referring to collaborating community members as APMs. However, for the sake of clarity, I refer to these co-researchers as APMs.
- 2 Standard ethical permissions were obtained from P2RP youth participants and their parents/caregivers/adults legally allowed to provide proxy consent, including for photographic data. Nevertheless, because I could not reach all participants/participants' parents/caregivers to consent to publication of their photographs in this article, I have blocked out their faces.

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