

...with Jacqueline Akhurst

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One inspiration

From early on, Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1977) writings about ecological systems theory were of fundamental importance to me. These ideas immediately resonated with my experiences of working as a schoolteacher with learners who experienced difficulties, and the model became very important as a tool for teaching psychology in post-apartheid South Africa.

One moment that changed the course of your career

When, as a secondary school geography teacher, the head teacher asked me to take on the role of school counsellor (at the time I was completing my honours in psychology and studying a module in counselling psychology by correspondence).

One important application of community psychology

There are some very good examples of community psychologists working with

marginalised youth and immigrants in London and East Anglia. Following the principles of community psychology enables connections to be made with these groups of people, who would not often seek assistance or gain access to traditional psychological services.

One book that you think all psychologists should read

I think the 1978 translation of Lev Vygotsky's *Mind in Society* is of vital importance, because of its emphasis on the interaction between cultural/historical influences and individuals. We are immersed in rich language and social interactions from birth, and I believe these are fundamental to our development.

One challenge you think community psychology faces

We established the BPS Community Psychology Section in 2010, just as the financial crunch was having



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dramatic effects on local authority services and the NHS. Our challenge therefore, is to establish our credibility and find ways of working in partnership with others, when a number of the programmes with which our work would have had a natural affinity (e.g. Sure Start) have faced dramatic cuts in funding.

One nugget of advice for

aspiring psychologists

Don't be put off by the nay-sayers and the daunting path towards becoming a psychologist. Strive to build a portfolio of skills and experiences, especially in voluntary and third sector organisations, and find ways to explore and 'give away' your knowledge of the rich evidence base being built in many areas of psychology, wherever you find yourself working.

One treasured possession

I have owned my own motorcycle since my teens, and my latest is a Triumph 800 Tiger, which my husband and I look forward to using next summer to tour parts of Europe!

One hero from psychology past or present

At present I am particularly drawn to the integrationist work of Dan Siegel, and his approach to 'interpersonal neurobiology'.

One way HE teaching could become more community driven

A growing number of undergraduate programmes are working with various forms of community-based learning, as part of a work placement system. These could be 'long and thin' over the course of a semester, or more concentrated over a three- to four- week period in early summer. Such initiatives give students invaluable experiences of applying psychology in 'real-life' situations, and can impact on their career thinking.

More answers online at www.thepsychologist.org.uk

resource

www.pnarchive.org/cardsort2/cardsort_psychology
'I developed this online card sort whilst working at the Higher Education Academy Psychology Network. It's for undergraduate psychology students to develop their employability awareness.'

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