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MOBILISING CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS : A Community Psychology approach

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MOBILISING CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS

A Community Psychology approach

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Abstract

This chapter addresses critical consciousness (CC) in educational and community psychology interventions with young people.

We first introduce the conceptualisation of CC and its components, the main research findings on the links between CC and some individual and contextual variables, and its association with positive developmental outcomes. Then, we focus on interventions aimed to foster CC development in adolescents and young adults, presenting two case studies.

The first case study is based on Youth-led Participatory Action Research (Y-PAR). The main goal was to promote critical active European citizenship, involving students at an Italian high school in a practical experience of PAR on social issues at local and European level. The second case study is based on the implementation of the service-learning (SL) methodology to promote CC and civic and cultural competences in Italian university students. Here the focus is on analysing the reflexive process in SL as a "tool" to critically understand and address social and cultural issues.

Finally, the implications of CC for a future Community Psychology praxis are discussed.

Resumen

El capítulo aborda el tema de la conciencia crítica (CC), por lo que concierne las intervenciones basadas en psicología educativa y comunitaria entre la población joven.

En principio presentamos la conceptualización de CC y sus componentes, los principales resultados sobre los vínculos entre CC y algunas variables individuales y contextuales, y su asociación con resultados de desarrollo positivo. Posteriormente, nos enfocamos en el análisis de intervenciones destinadas a promover el desarrollo de CC en adolescentes y jóvenes.

El primer estudio de caso fue basado en la Investigación Acción Participativa dirigida por jóvenes (IAP). El objetivo principal era promover la ciudadanía europea crítica activa, involucrando a los estudiantes de una escuela secundaria italiana en una experiencia práctica

de IAP sobre temas sociales a nivel local y europeo. El segundo estudio de caso fue basado en la implementación de la metodología de Aprendizaje-Servicio (ApS) para promover CC y competencias cívicas y culturales en los estudiantes universitarios italianos. El enfoque era analizar el proceso reflexivo en ApS como "herramienta" para comprender y abordar críticamente los problemas sociales y culturales.

Finalmente, las implicaciones para una futura praxis de Psicología Comunitaria fueran discutidos.

Introduction

This chapter addresses critical consciousness (CC), an issue that has been the object of increasing attention and interest by researchers in recent years and is now an established and fast-growing field, particularly in educational and Community Psychology (CP) interventions with young people. Heberle et al. (2020) in their systematic review have identified 67 studies of CC development in adolescents and young adults, published between 1998 and 2019, 60% of which appeared in 2016 or later. This exponential growth of research suggests that CC is a crucial issue, particularly in the current historical period, more than it has ever been (Rapa & Geldhof, 2020). On the one hand, CC is increasingly considered an important skill to be promoted through educational and empowerment-oriented interventions; on the other hand, evaluation research has confirmed the positive association between CC and positive developmental outcomes.

We will first introduce the conceptualisation of CC and its components; then, a short presentation of the main research findings on the links between CC and some individual and contextual variables will be provided (e.g. parent and peer socialisation, school climate, social emotional functioning, community engagement). We will conclude by focusing on interventions aimed to foster CC development in adolescents and young adults.

The conceptualisation of CC

The conceptualisation of CC is traced back to the foundational critical pedagogy theory developed by Paulo Freire (1973, 1968/2000), as well as to more contemporary theorisation on sociopolitical and CC development (Watts et al., 2011). Based on Freire's pedagogy that is rooted in the link between theory and praxis to develop CC, Jemal's (2017) recent review of the literature provides an in-depth analysis of the inconsistencies in the divergent scholarship within CC theory and practice, and suggests ideas to support the need for a new, CC-based construct, *transformative potential*. In particular, the author underlines the different conceptualisations of CC regarding the number of components considered, from just one (critical reflection, a purely cognitive state that derives from the critical analysis of sociopolitical inequity; Diemer & Li, 2011); to two (the capacity to critically reflect but also to act upon one's oppressive environment; Campbell & MacPhail, 2002); to three (cognitive – critical reflection or critical social analysis, attitudinal or political efficacy – the perceived capacity to realise sociopolitical change, and behavioural – civic or political action; Watts et al., 2011). Another critical point is that some definitions formulate CC as a continuous *process* of growth and development rather than an *outcome* derived from the process of *conscientisation* (i.e. consciousness-raising). Finally, a further issue of confusion in the literature is that some scholars include the tools, strategies and methods for conscientisation within the definition of CC, whereas for Jemal (2017), it is important to distinguish between CC and the tools used to develop CC.

The list of tools to promote CC development at school, which can be embedded in formal education curricula, includes: dialogue or open discussions regarding inequity; reflective questioning; psychosocial support; establishment of co-learning; non-hierarchical, respectful relationships between students and teachers engaged in a process of co-constructing know-ledge; small-group discussions and interactions. Despite these distinctions, which sometimes appear "artificial" and linked to the different operationalisations for research purposes, it seems that all scholars rely on Freire's position on CC:

> Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection, and action, in such a radical interaction that if one is sacrificed – even in part – the other immediately suffers. There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis.
>
> *(Freire, 1968/2000, p. 87)*

More recently, two contributions have been published: firstly, a special issue of the *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* edited by Rapa and Geldhof (2020), on new directions for understanding the development of CC during adolescence, which addresses key issues related to its measurement, mechanisms, precursors and outcomes. The second, a systematic review by Heberle et al. (2020) also provides a critical assessment and recommendations for future research. There is consistency across the existing literature in acknowledging as key components of CC critical reflection, critical motivation and critical action. **Critical reflection** occurs when people identify structural inequalities, perceive those inequalities as unjust and connect them to discriminatory systems (Diemer et al., 2017). **Critical motivation** is people's sense of sociopolitical efficacy (i.e. beliefs about their ability to impact sociopolitical conditions) and their commitment to enacting change (Diemer et al., 2016). **Critical action** is the behavioural component of CC and refers to how people go about engaging in activities intended to effect change and address inequalities. Critical action can occur at both individual and group levels (Tyler et al., 2020).

In CP work, promoting all the above dimensions of CC among young people is crucial to foster sociopolitical development and reduce the negative impact of structural inequalities and conditions of oppression on young people's well-being and psychosocial health (Watts et al., 2011). Community psychologists can use tools for *conscientisation* in the context of education to address oppressive conditions and educational disparities, as well as to facilitate youths' agency in challenging the status quo (Jemal, 2017).

Link between CC and variables of adolescent development

We now have a substantial body of literature that provides robust findings on links between CC and some individual and contextual factors impacting on adolescent development (e.g. parent and peer socialisation, school climate, social emotional functioning, community engage-ment). There is evidence of the positive relation between **parent and peer socialisation and CC**, particularly the reflection and motivation dimensions of CC: CC increases when parents and peers engage adolescents in discussions over social issues and support critical analysis of conditions of injustice. The findings are mixed for critical action, depending on how the vari-able of socialisation has been operationalised (Heberle et al., 2020).

Some studies have analysed the association between critical action and **school climate**, operationalised as levels of teacher encouragement of open discussion of challenging social and political issues at school: this climate favours adolescents' awareness about conditions of injustice and oppression, stimulating "critical curiosity" and supporting CC development in

marginalised youth (Clark & Seider, 2017). For marginalised youth (such as high-school-aged girls of colour in the USA, in the research of Clonan-Roy et al., 2016), there is evidence that CC is related to <u>social-emotional functioning</u>, including positive sense of self, leadership skills, positive youth development competencies and also resistance and resilience. Nevertheless, not all the studies show the expected positive relations between social-emotional functioning and the dimensions of CC. The same mixed results emerged in the studies on relations between CC and academic functioning or achievement outcomes.

A further relevant issue in this context is the link between the development of CC and **community engagement**, defined as participation in community-based activities. Some studies provide evidence of such a link, that is, that community engagement can promote critical reflection and critical action, but many questions remain unanswered, such as the characteristics of community-engaged experiences or activities, and the potential reciprocal relations between various dimensions of CC and community engagement (Heberle et al., 2020).

Interventions: how to promote CC in young people?

Community psychologists are increasingly required to act as CC mobilisers when working with youth and local communities, by fostering young people's competences, promoting empowering processes in and out of school, or reducing the intergenerational gap with elders. How can the new generation of community psychologists learn knowledge and skills to develop and mobilise CC among youth and community members? Heberle et al.'s (2020) review summarised the extensive literature on curricular interventions used by teachers to support the development of CC, within different school subjects (literature, arts, social sciences, civic education, ethnic studies) and using a range of methods to discuss issues of unfairness, injustice, power, privileges and oppression, stereotypes and bias, to relate the content of the texts to their lived experience and to critically reflect on such content. Findings of these studies showed an increase in critical awareness, political efficacy and critical action among participants (Kozan et al., 2017). As to extracurricular interventions, it is worth mentioning some out-of-school programmes that used Y-PAR (Sánchez Carmen et al., 2015) or service-learning activities (Winans-Solis, 2014): these were designed specifically to promote critical reflection and critical action among marginalised youth, through consciousness-raising about discrimination, oppression and socio-economic inequity.

In the following sections we illustrate two examples of how we used reflexivity and experiential engaged learning as "tools" to address social and cultural challenges and promote CC in Italian high school students and university students. The first intervention utilised Y-PAR, the second is based upon service-learning.

Promoting critical consciousness through Y-PAR

Y-PAR is a theoretical-methodological approach used to enhance young people's empowerment and civic engagement as well as positive development (Anyon et al., 2018). Young people are trained and involved in all phases of a research process in order to identify and analyse issues relevant to their lives, report to relevant stakeholders and advocate for solutions or influence policies and decisions (Ozer et al., 2010).

How might Y-PAR promote critical consciousness?

Ozer and Douglas (2015) identified the following core processes of Y-PAR: youth–adult partnerships and research with the aim of identifying and investigating social issues; iterative

integration of research and action; the practice of critical reflection and discussing strategies for social change; and building supportive networks with stakeholders. For Cammarota and Fine (2008), "Y-PAR teaches young people that conditions of injustice are produced, not natural; are designed to privilege and oppress; but are ultimately challengeable and thus changeable" (p. 2). Several research studies have highlighted that Y-PAR can foster critical thinking in discussions about the root causes of social issues (Foster-Fishman et al., 2010) or when discussing contrasting interpretations of data (Scott et al., 2015). Y-PAR promotes new, systemic, ecological views of a problem and skills in research inquiry, considering evidence, communication, teamwork and advocacy.

Y-PAR in the school context

A critical approach to teaching and learning, as in Y-PAR, might contribute to youth empowerment through the development of critical reflection (Anyon et al., 2018). However, its implementation in the school context requires that several challenges be addressed: moving teacher–student relationships towards greater horizontality; adapting activities to existing structure, timing and the competing demands of school curriculum; enabling different capacities of schools to network with external stakeholders; and establishing youth-adult partnerships (Ozer et al., 2010). The potential of Y-PAR to foster critical awareness and sociopolitical development (SPD) may also be offset by teachers' reluctance to address politically sensitive or controversial topics (Kornbluh et al., 2015).

There is also the risk of "schoolification" of Y-PAR as in: "the transformation of the inquiry and action process from internally motivated and holistic to a series of graded assignments" (Rubin et al., 2017, p. 183). This danger is related to the inherent tensions resulting from applying Y-PAR in a compulsory setting, which pose fundamental constraints to the voice and power of students. To avoid the depoliticisation of Y-PAR and maintain its focus on critical and transformational analysis, interventions in schools should be explicit and balance carefully decision-making dynamics and power-sharing between adults and students.

Case study 1: A Y-PAR intervention targeting the development of active citizenship

To exemplify the use of Y-PAR to promote CC at school, we present an intervention with the main goal of promoting critical active European citizenship as part of the H2020 European Project CATCH-EyoU. The intervention was rooted in the theories of SPD and empowerment (Wallerstein et al., 2005; Zimmerman, 2000) as well as the theory of Freire (1968/ 2000) about the banking and problem-posing concepts of education. Moreover, we applied the principles of youth-adult partnerships (Anyon et al., 2018).

The aim of this intervention was to involve students in a practical experience of Y-PAR focusing on concrete social issues that they identified as relevant in their own lives and for other people in their local communities, with a European dimension. The goal was to involve young people in elaborating strategies to address the selected issues, either individually or collectively, by eliciting solutions from political institutions.

The Y-PAR intervention, which lasted two school years, was offered to students (16- and 17-year-olds) attending the third year of an Italian high school within a specific mandatory curricular schedule, in which students must learn job-related skills. This allowed at least 100 hours per year, good flexibility in adjusting it, as well as the collaboration of researchers and teachers as tutors.

Students decided on the topic, the methods to collect data and how to share it with the local community. The collaborating adults were teachers and community psychologists. Teachers received training and guidelines on the Y-PAR method and principles in international workshops. The adults supported the participants throughout the process, but the responsibility for the students' work at each stage was in their own hands.

We adopted a two-step participatory approach, in which participants were involved in the cycle of research (analysis of social issues) and intervention (elaborating proposals to address the social issues) at a local level and subsequently at an international European level. In the first year (2016–17), students were involved in the phases of identifying social issues located in their community, mapping and understanding the issues by collecting data, and sharing findings with stakeholders in their local communities and with students and researchers at an international level (at the H2020 project's conference).

After the first year, a phase of reflection allowed students to understand how the social issues identified at a local level could be addressed on a European level. In the second year (2017–18), students: (1) were provided information on the structure and the functioning of the European Union (EU); (2) collected data by contacting representatives of EU institutions, shared research material and had discussions between students from different countries through an online platform; (3) contacted EU organisations and representatives to explore how to address the issue at the EU level; (4) provided ideas for intervention/solution for the EU institutions; (5) attended as main protagonists the H2020 project final conference in Brussels, to discuss and share their proposals with representatives of the EU institutions, public officials and peers from other European countries.

The impact evaluation of the intervention was conducted using a mixed-method approach, including questionnaires and focus groups, both at the beginning and at the end. The quantitative quasi-experimental evaluation revealed that, compared to a control group, Y-PAR participants reported higher scores on social well-being, institutional trust and participation, and lower scores on political alienation (Prati et al., 2020). These improvements in active citizenship were consistent with previous research documenting the effect of Y-PAR in terms of developmental benefits and civic engagement (Anyon et al., 2018).

Examining further the perspectives of participants on the experience, using thematic content analysis of focus groups, we found that students also developed a more nuanced and sophisticated representation of active citizenship, by incorporating critical awareness into the notion (Albanesi et al., 2021). They moved from a "concrete" factual view (e.g. demonstrating, volunteering, voting) towards a more complex view where critical awareness played a key role, both at an individual and at the community level. On a transnational level, the intervention allowed participants to increase their critical awareness of the role the EU plays or potentially could play, in addressing social issues located in their communities (e.g. immigration). The intervention seemed to impact variables that had to do more with the practical experience of being citizens in Europe, while variables related to an abstract support for the EU did not seem to be influenced (Prati et al., 2020). The students involved in the intervention may become less supportive of EU policies and identify less with the EU, but this does not mean that they will be less engaged or committed to changing those policies. This finding may be the result of the practice of critical reflection on the current EU policies and political agenda, including both supportive and critical views on national and EU political institutions.

Overall, in applying Y-PAR, we stress the importance of enhancing students' involvement in the process of research on social issues relevant to them (ownership), requiring critical analysis of information sources (including direct access to reliable sources of information), to better

understand their nature and their root causes and reflect on measures that could be adopted to address them.

Y-PAR in school can offer concrete opportunities to develop a critical understanding of societal issues, supporting the notion that participation can change the way of approaching the teaching and learning process. Some challenges also emerged during the different phases of the project implementation. One of the main challenges in implementing Y-PAR in educational settings is the risk of considering inquiry and the research action process as traditional school tasks that require evaluation for grades. Based on this case study, we underline the importance of successful partnerships with teachers and school administrations to ensure the transformative capacity of Y-PAR and promote empowering processes in educational settings. We were very attentive to requiring the school to fulfil some conditions that in our perspective, and coherently with the literature, are needed to translate Y-PAR principles into practice. Indeed, teachers were asked to let students develop the different phases of Y-PAR autonomously in methods and content, with their support when needed. Moreover, teachers were trained on Y-PAR principles and methodology at the beginning of the project, accepted the risk of horizontality and collaboration, and were not afraid to share part of their power and lose their traditional authoritative role.

Service-learning to promote critical consciousness in higher education

Service-learning methodology: the role of reflexivity

Service-learning (SL), sometimes referred to as community-based or community-engaged learning, integrates service for the community and learning with the aim of enhancing the civic responsibility of the students and strengthening the community resources through work on a real-world problem (Aramburuzabala et al., 2019). On the one hand, SL is designed to offer students the opportunity to acquire new competencies and skills, through direct experience in the community that is relevant to their learning, and to be involved in an organisation located in a specific context. On the other hand, SL is designed to meet the organisation's needs identified by the community through university–community partnerships, which offer community organisations different ways (e.g. providing mentoring activities and direct service, and spending time with community members, expanding their networks) to advance their mission, while having a direct impact on community members (McIlrath et al., 2012).

For students, learning and civic development "do not necessarily occur as a result of experience itself but as a result of a reflection process" (Jacoby & Associates, 2003, p. 4). Indeed, SL is not just about doing; it is about reflecting on what is done (e.g. activity, service), how it is done (process and methods of implementation), and where it is done (organisation and community context). The reflective process refers to regular and ongoing activities, where students analyse and think critically about emotional responses to service activities in the context of a particular course or curriculum. The process is guided by academics or community partners, and allows for the understanding of the diverse perspectives inherent in the community challenges that students are experiencing. The goal is to help students acquire and use complex information and develop abilities to identify, frame and address social problems.

The cycle of reflection that occurs within a SL project develops through: making links with the learning objectives; scheduling activities regularly to expand the service experience; offering guidance for the activities; allowing feedback and assessment; engaging in clarification

of values (Hatcher & Bringle, 1997). Reflection needs to be situated within the political and ethical contexts of teaching and learning, by directly addressing questions pertaining to equity, accessibility and social justice; these concepts should shape the learning experience for students.

Promoting civic and cultural competences through SL

SL reflective experiences contribute to a deeper understanding of social problems that make it possible for students to identify, frame and address them as engaged citizens, having the opportunity to combine active engagement in communities, and civic and democratic competencies development (Eyler, 2002). As such, SL fits with the educational priorities of EU policy statements that emphasise "active citizenship" and the development of "civic competences" at all levels of education. The Council of Europe developed the Competences for Democratic Culture and Intercultural Dialogue (CDC) model to identify the skills and knowledge that students at different levels of formal education should develop, in order to respond appropriately and effectively to the demands, challenges and opportunities of contemporary heterogeneous complex societies, thus being able to perform democratic, active and responsible citizenship (Barrett, 2016). Openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, respect, civic mindedness, responsibility and critical thinking are included in the CDC model and are often reported as the main outcomes of SL for students (), besides disciplinary and academic achievements (Celio et al., 2011; Salam et al., 2019).

Special attention has been devoted recently to cultural competence in SL, as its development is becoming more and more important to engage effectively in a culturally diverse society. Vargas and Erba (2017) proposed a conceptualisation of cultural competence as a multidimensional process that involves three dimensions: cultural awareness, cultural knowledge and cultural skills. A fourth dimension was introduced by Súarez-Balcazar et al. (2011), namely cultural practice.

Vargas and Erba (2017) developed a programme of SL based on their conceptualisation, that used creative activities to foster a sense of citizenship by promoting undergraduate students' awareness of the social issues faced by Latino/a youth, a feeling of personal responsibility regarding cultural issues, and a desire to contribute to solve social problems. They reported that students learned to make the connection between the theory around public issues studied in the classroom, and the personal experience they had through their SL. Indeed, the midterm impact evaluation showed an enhanced awareness and sense of citizenship of undergraduate students. Overall, the development of cultural competence requires students' and academics' engagement in a process of (critical) cultural reflection, which involves thoroughly analysing and monitoring beliefs, attitudes and behaviours towards the value of cultural diversity, exploring best practices for teaching culturally diverse students, and being inclusive to incorporate more positive views of culturally diverse students (Gay & Kirkland, 2003).

Case study 2: Reflexive process in SL experiences. How does reflexivity develop? Evidence from the experiences developed in Bologna

As we have seen in the previous paragraphs, the reflexive process is a vital component of SL experiences. As mentioned in the Erasmus Plus project Europe Engage (Aramburuzabala et al., 2019), reflection leads students to link their experiences to the theoretical and methodological background of the academic disciplines and enhances a mechanism that encourages students to link their service experiences to their academic curricula, offering students structured

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opportunities to reflect upon the effects of their service. Different tools and methods can be used to support students' reflections on the SL experiences, including group/class discussions, essays and other specific assignments that relate the civic learning with the discipline and the curriculum. The reflective journal is one of the most important tools to encourage students to critically reflect on their personal growth and on the process of collaboration developed within university–community partnerships (de los Ríos & Ochoa, 2012). The journal's main purpose is to help students think more deeply and analytically about concepts and experiences arising from the readings, the lectures, field experiences and seminars (Evans et al., 2013). It allows continuous reflection, as students are invited to write their journals weekly and to register any critical incidents that may have occurred during SL; it supports situated reflection as students are invited to reflect on their own experience as it develops in a specific community organisation (situated) and to relate it to core disciplinary contents.

We have developed SL modules that complement CP courses of two different master's degrees (one in clinical psychology and the other on school and community psychology); and an SL module that complements the transversal competences courses offered by the University of Bologna, with a specific focus on civic competences. The modules have been developed in partnership with community organisations active in different fields (e.g. health promotion, social inclusion and diversity, active citizenship). In the modules we use reflective journals to help students articulate their learning and recognise its value for them and the communities. We strongly emphasise rigorous reflective writing, offering guiding questions for students, based on specific reflection models (e.g. Description, Examination, Articulation of Learning, DEAL; Ash & Clayton, 2009) and challenging them with provocative questions during class discussions (see Table 22.1). The reflexive journal contains: sections on analysis of personal, organisational and other problems faced in the communities; on the relation between SL, academic learning and curricular contents; and reflections on connections between academic achievement, civic engagement and personal growth.

Some quotes from the reflexive journals give a brief overview of the types of reflection developed during the experiences, and competences acquired during the SL projects:

> *My experience as collaborator in this context [organisation] was useful. It helped to develop my competencies in teamwork, and collaboration with peers and other people. I also discovered [that I have] good communication skills with adolescents, which will be helpful for a future job. I "touched with my hands" what it means to work in a team in a structured organisation, knowing its strengths and weaknesses.*
>
> *(Clinical Psychology student, Post-school service)*

> *Thinking about the need for a change of perspective and networking, I think that the "community" can be the answer […] the community that has to be educated to take care, to have a wide perspective, to networking and partnership; to unify citizens, to look at resources and not at problems.*
>
> *(Clinical Psychology student, Migrants and refugees centre)*

> *This is another place where a psychologist – above all a community psychologist – could be supportive: none of the people involved in the project knew how to draw up an evaluation plan of a social project and the only ones who were aware of their importance were stakeholders who fund the project. For me, to give an in-depth and sensitive evaluation could make the project valued by all the people interested in and involved.*
>
> *(Community Psychology student, Post-school service)*

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Table 22.1 DEAL model guidelines adapted for students' reflection on serving learning

DEAL *model of reflection (adapted from Ash and Clayton, 2009)*

Sequential steps	Guiding questions
1. **D**escription of experiences in an objective and detailed manner.	• When did you get the experience? • Where did it take place? • Who was with you? Who wasn't there? • What did you do/say? What did the others do/say? • Was there anything powerful about the experience you did? • What emotions did you feel?
2. **E**xamination of those experiences considering specific learning objectives (in the case of SL at least for academic enhancement, civic learning and personal growth).	Referring to some learning objectives: critical awareness, civic skills, principles and methods of Community Psychology • Use key concepts and theoretical perspectives to analyse some aspects of the experience. • Refer specifically to aspects of experience that have been made clearer by applying the theory, models and tools of discipline.
3. **A**rticulation of **L**earning that concretises specific learning related to the outcomes.	**"I learned that"** … Illustrate a meaningful learning from your SL experience Explain which concepts/principles/values you have learned best, as a result of reflection on experience. • How what you have learned can/could be generalised/applied in a broader sense (contexts/situations)? **"I learned it when"** … Explain how learning is linked to specific moments/activities/situations **"What I learned** is important **because"** … • What's the value of your learning? (it applies to the specific situation, other contexts, as it concerns your profession, your way of being etc) • How is it linked to the key themes of the discipline and the objectives of the SL?

Critical reflexivity emphasises praxis: students are asked to question assumptions and taken-for-granted actions, thinking about who they are and how their professional and civic competences can be developed through community service (Evans et al., 2013). SL offers the opportunity to experience an agentic role through service, and to consider principles, values and practices of Community Psychology in the making (Dalton & Wolfe, 2012). Reflective practice as it develops in SL offers the opportunity to students to think about their (future) roles as community psychologists, to consider their strengths, their weaknesses and their positions regarding the change they want to make as psychologists.

SL allows students to meet real-world challenges of the community and collaborate for solutions that are meaningful and relevant to community partners and students. Engaging in developing solutions, they learn how complex it may be to address the multiple causes of a specific problem, but they also understand that there are multiple ways of contributing, and that their contribution matters. Confronting multiple perspectives, they understand the risks

of orthodoxia, but also the importance of having a solid methodological and theoretical preparation; experiencing diversity (inside and outside community organisations), they develop a "new" understanding of taking positions, of accepting diversity, of being invested with responsibility from the community, recognising that these are not merely cognitive processes but involve the person as a whole (Conway et al., 2009).

Conclusion

The substantial growth of the empirical literature on the development CC in adolescents shows the increasing interest in the topic, due to the associations of CC with several positive developmental outcomes. In the present chapter we have first presented recent conceptualisations of CC as consisting of three components: *critical reflection*, *critical motivation* or political efficacy, and *critical action* or engagement in activities intended to affect change. Then the main research findings on the links between CC and some individual and contextual variables were examined. Drawing on these findings, we addressed the question of how to promote CC in young people: it is our belief that this is a crucial question for the new generation of youth that needs tools to understand and face the social and cultural crises they are experiencing during this pandemic period, but also for the community psychologists who need to learn and use new intervention tools.

Community psychologists are trained in interpersonal relationships, including communication skills, teamwork and group process facilitation, with an emphasis on being able to consider multiple perspectives, adopting multilevel approaches for an ecological understanding of social issues, and bearing witness to oppression (Francescato & Zani, 2017). They are also increasingly required to reveal and address social injustice, being able to recognise how it is maintained at the structural, institutional, interpersonal and individual level. As such, community psychologists are also required to make their values and standpoints explicit, not escaping the moral risk of distance. Since its foundation, CP has dealt with a simple though provocative question: *faced with social challenges (inequalities, injustice, exclusion), what shall we do?* Any effort to provide an answer to such a question, requires the community psychologist to be an agent of change. We have chosen two interventions to promote CC in Italian high school students and university students, as examples of how we used reflexivity and experiential engaged learning as "tools" to address social and cultural challenges.

Lessons learned and limitations.

The Y-PAR intervention showed that it is possible to establish a productive partnership with schools, as well as other community stakeholders, to create a joint "learning journey" capable of supporting and strengthening youths' agency and sociopolitical awareness. By supporting youth in learning a range of skills, community psychologists can collaborate with other adults, contributing their specific expertise (e.g., scientific research approach and methods, group management and organisation). To avoid limitations inherent in applying Y-PAR in a compulsory setting, school–university partnerships should be constructed and maintained from the very beginning through continuous interactions between school and university. In this way Y-PAR can change the approach to teaching and learning at school and may be a strong ally for addressing the new demands of the school curriculum (i.e. equipping students with key competences for life).

The SL experience with senior students addressed CC as a complex process that requires an intentional active role of both academics and community partners: who share the responsibility

to offer students opportunities to question their experiences; to develop some awareness of the challenges that they may encounter and engage with as citizens and future professionals. Limitations in SL depend mostly on its implementation: sometimes the SL approach drives the community-based experience only in theory, while in practical terms what is offered is not very different from a traineeship or internship; the capacity of the programmes to stimulate reflexivity can be evaluated only post hoc; thus, there is also the risk of offering inconsistent experiences. Other limitations concern assessment: there is little evidence of long-term impact on students, and on faculty. Despite these limitations, we think that by choosing SL as a method to train students, we make explicit and "real" some CP assumptions: engaging personally with the community is mandatory, learning (and competences development) is a relational co-constructed process, neutrality is not an option, thus contributing to designing a clear pathway for developing critical (aware) CP praxis.

What to do next? Challenges for the years to come

The CC development in young people is an area that needs further research. There are methodological problems and key arguments to be explored in more depth, such as the measurement of the construct (Heberle et al., 2020). Rapa et al. (2020), after discussing the limitations of existing CC measures, present their recently developed instrument, the Short Critical Consciousness Scale (CCS-S), which provides evidence on measurement invariance across respondents of different ethnic, age and gender identity groups. Moreover, it is important to: integrate rigorous quantitative methods using control groups or quasi-experimental methods when assessing the impact of existing interventions; use longitudinal research to analyse the developmental pathway to build CC in children and adolescents with varying identities; understand how the relations among the three CC components vary across development in different contexts. At the theoretical level, there are still some unanswered questions and new directions to be explored (Rapa & Geldhof, 2020): the relationship among the components of CC across the developmental periods and over time, both within individuals and across groups; the conditions under which CC can be fostered; the precursors and the outcomes of the interventions aimed at developing CC in children and adolescents.

At the time of writing this chapter (February 2021), the situation in our country and many others is again becoming critical, due to the second wave of the coronavirus: the implications not only for the social and economic system but also for the day-to-day activities of our lives and the psychological consequences are enormous, and in some aspects still unpredictable and unknown. But we want to conclude with a note of hope, underlining the importance of CC right now: CC may contribute to an adaptive development and foster well-being, especially among those experiencing marginalisation and oppression (Rapa & Geldhof, 2020). There are many ongoing experiences that illustrate the capacity of marginalised communities to use CC to deal with actual change supporting a process of adaptive development despite the pandemic. These experiences are precious, and worth being known, understood and shared as they can be used to build different narratives about power, capacity and strength. For this reason, an informal international network of community psychologists (supported by ECPA, European Community Psychology Association; SCRA, Society for Community Research and Action; and the Community Toolbox) has created the New Bank for Community Ideas and Solutions (www.ecpa-online.com/new-bank), a place where anyone can deposit (and even download) stories that can inspire (new generations of) community psychologists. CC may also be a means by which individuals, groups and communities, marginalised or not (that includes more

privileged counterparts), try to promote social change for a more equitable world. Our hope is that practitioners, and especially community psychologists, will be able to develop targeted approaches to support young people in their pathways to acquiring CC.

Notes on authorship

The authors are both senior researchers (Bruna Zani, Elvira Cicognani and Cinzia Albanesi) and early career researchers (Antonella Guarino and Iana Tzankova), who have been involved in research and evaluation of educational and community interventions centred on youth socio-political development. All authors were involved in the Catch–EyoU research project, within which a Y-PAR intervention for youth active citizenship was implemented (case study 1). Cinzia Albanesi and Antonella Guarino are currently involved in SL programmes offered at the University of Bologna (case study 2).

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