

Teaching Academic Dogs and Cats New Tricks: ‘Re-Tooling’ Senior Academic

Researchers for Collaborative Community-based Research

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“What value-for-dollar has Newfoundland ever got from its university? Good question. But what in the name of God do you hope to get out of that poor specimen of a ‘perffessor’ trapped out there in a baby barn? . . . Suppose he’s a professor of Philosophy or Divinity or Sociology? He’d never in a hundred years have a thought anyone could use.”

Ray Guy, The Sunday Independent, June 6, 2004, p. 4.

Introduction

The practice of academic research, particularly in the social sciences and humanities, is changing dramatically. Driven by an emerging consensus among philanthropic foundations, government agencies and other major sources of research funding, a new focus encouraging ‘relevancy’, transparency, collaboration, multidisciplinary, practicality and accountability both within academia and between it and the larger society are emerging as important conditions for funding access. Canada is following examples already set in Britain, the United States, France and most other Western societies in refocusing significant portions of resources dispersed through government-funded granting agencies to programs that focus on greater public participation in the defining and executing of social research. In this paper we follow the lead of much of the literature and refer to the resulting research as ‘community-based research’ (CBR). In Canada, the most significant funding agencies leading this refocusing are the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). The latter is the major Canadian academic funding agency for the social sciences and humanities. A recently released Council document entitled “From Granting Council to Knowledge Council”, offers the following observation in its call for a sweeping reassessment of its objectives and practices:

“ The role of the researcher is not only to develop knowledge . . . They must become far more proficient at moving the knowledge from research to action, and in the process, at linking up with a broad range of researchers and stakeholder partners across the country.”¹

¹ “From Granting Council to Knowledge Council”. P. 4. Document located at http://www.sshrc.ca/web/whatsnew/initiatives/transformation/consultation_framework_e.pdf. See also “Helping Research in Education to Matter More”. August 2003. SSHRC Discussion sponsored discussion paper. Located at http://www.sshrc.ca/web/whatsnew/initiatives/transformation/ben_levin.pdf and Martha C. Piper, “Building a Civil Society: A New Role for the Human Sciences”. October 2002. URL located at http://www.president.ubc.ca/president/speeches/24oct02_killam.pdf

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In SSHRC's case, the primary mechanism to achieve this objective is the Community University Research Alliance (CURA). CURA's primary intent is to:

“promote research and social innovation by funding vital, creative partnerships between universities and communities. It helps universities and their local partners to work together for the social, cultural and economic development of communities².”

Our own CURA funded project defines itself as a:

“... multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral partnership that combines the strengths of academic and community based researchers in creating a framework for research, knowledge generation and analysis, and is committed to building a future in Newfoundland and Labrador.³”

As SSHRC follows a pattern of transforming itself from a more traditional academic granting agency for the social sciences and humanities to a knowledge council brokering relationships within as well as outside university communities, researchers requiring funds to conduct research, as well as advancement within the academic hierarchy, will increasingly be encouraged to join multidisciplinary teams, build ‘community partnerships’, collaboratively define research questions and communicate results in everyday language.

Such transformation in the planning and implementation of research raises important questions for university researchers as well as their community partners. In this paper, our primary focus is upon the academic researcher and his/her adaptations to this new funding reality. At many universities across Canada, the next few years will see a significant number of senior academic researchers retiring. Our paper is therefore written with this potential ‘windfall’ of well-trained academic researchers specifically in mind. Most, if not all, of our suggestions, however, apply equally to young researchers at the outset of their academic careers. To facilitate academic participation in CBR answers to several important questions must be sought. How much of a departure is community-based research from the experiences of university researchers, even those with extensive records of ‘applied’ or practical research? Is a fundamentally different way of approaching social research required? Are new skill sets, both research and

² From CURA URL located at http://www.sshrc.ca/web/apply/background/cura2001_e.asp

³ From CSC CURA URL located at <http://www.envision.ca/templates/cura.asp?ID=3667>

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interpersonal, needed? If so, what are they and how easily will these new tricks of the research trade be learned? Will certain academics find the challenges more difficult than others? If so, which ones and why? In this paper we offer our thoughts on these and related queries based on our extensive research experience in academia and a community based research institute respectively, as well as our three-year collaboration in a CURA funded initiative.

The paper begins with an overview highlighting important features of university based social research, including applied or practical research. Drawing on the first authors' more than thirty year academic experiences in sociology, political economy and social psychology including extensive participation in multidisciplinary 'program' as well as applied research, the paper provides a brief historical overview of shifting research priorities within academe over the last one hundred years. Following an overview of CBR, several areas of difference are noted that potentially offer new challenges and require new orientations and skills by academics. We briefly examine personal and institutional factors that may exacerbate or, conversely facilitate, successful negotiation of these challenges. Particular emphasis is given to possible influences of academic career stage, gender of researcher and disciplinary affiliation. The paper concludes with a summary of important observations as well as several strategies to mitigate any challenges and more effectively link academics and community researchers.

Method and Data

As both participants and keen observers of community based research, many of our observations and arguments are, of necessity, reflexively personal. Each of us comes from a distinctive research tradition. One, although possessing a long history in what academics until recently termed 'applied research' has built his/her career essentially as a university researcher. Another author, as Chief Executive Officer of a large community based research and policy organization with an extensive history of research 'partnering' with community groups, brings different experiences and expectations of the research process. As research is always best considered a reflexive praxis, our different histories

and experiences have provided fertile ground to reflect, reassess and occasionally fret about our collaboration.

We hope our arguments are more than personal reflections. To this end, we have solicited, some might say even tormented, our academic, community and government research partners for their views on a number of points we raise. We have asked them to respond to several questions we feel underlie any potential differences between academic and community based research and movement from one to the other. The four most critical are:

- What are the essential defining characteristics of Community-based Research (CBR) in comparison to academic research?
- Are there important differences between such research and that practiced by social scientists and humanists in university settings?
- Are there important issues related in movement from one to the other?
- Can academic career stage, gender or discipline facilitate or impede such movement?

We have, as well, undertaken a review of relevant literature as well as extended our inquiry through soliciting views from other university and community researchers holding CURA grants in Canada. Our intent in such efforts has been to link our personal experiences to others at least in the Canadian context and thereby extend the discourse to a wider scale. While we alone remain responsible for the arguments in this paper, such ‘ground truthing’ hopefully elevates the discussion from personal reflection to a wider intellectual exchange. In the end, however, any inaccuracies, exaggerations or distortions remain ours.

Social Science and Humanities Research in Academe: A brief overview and history

Academic research is far from monolithic. Given its considerable diversity, it is therefore dangerous to suggest any commonality. Nonetheless, the overwhelming majority of social research at least (we leave for someone else a discussion of the Humanities) does possess a common core. Moreover, understanding this core is essential

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if comparisons are to be made with other styles of research such as CBR. Each academic discipline obviously has its own history and within that history can be found its own paradigmatic research preferences⁴. These preferences are not static but vary temporarily. At any point in history, each will have a hierarchy of more and less preferred methods, research questions, problem areas and theoretical approaches. What is ‘salient, leading edge’ research for one scholarly generation may be only marginally relevant or even theoretically ‘exhausted’ to the next.

The reward structure of academia can be largely understood within these shifting intellectual sands. What one does, and to a lesser extent how one did it and with whom, are critical in determining promotion, funding success, research ‘chairs’ and the other artifacts of academic success. As social science disciplines became more ‘professional’, particularly in the United States, the greater the importance of particular research issues, the status of the university where one trained and the status of one’s tutors as well.

In acknowledging this variability, one must not lose sight of underlying commonalities. Until relatively recent attacks from post modernism and feminism within academia and community research outside it, the overwhelming majority of sociological research, indeed of social research more generally, was defined by a commitment to a shared, overarching paradigm most commonly referred to as the scientific method. Even intellectual curiosity, the urge to know for the sake of potentially knowing the unknown, arose and was nurtured within a more focused, ‘problem centered’ disciplinary paradigm. While these ‘problem centered’ paradigms might shift in popularity and alleged importance for a variety of reasons, the scientific method remained firm as the infrastructure upon which knowledge was ultimately anchored. It provided rules for concept formation, criteria for evaluating their utility, rules for measurement to link them to the external world, a range of appropriate methodologies as well as interpretive rules for understanding. Even most qualitative social researchers remained committed to some form of scientific paradigm despite occasional rhetorical flirtation with other

⁴ See Kuhn, T. 1967. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. For a discussion of paradigms and research prioritization

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epistemologies⁵. While offers of research assistantships or fellowships certainly could attract promising researchers to specific research questions, relatively unbridled curiosity channeled through a shared commitment to certain avenues of inquiry defined by the scientific method underlay the quest for knowledge.

Successful socialization to such a view resulted in a loose yet coherent research culture in academia. As with any culture, those most abstract values that give meaning to the culture were seldom questioned. One additional cultural element is well worth mentioning since it contrasts with a rather different research culture associated with community-based undertakings. This element is ownership. Researchers own their work. This is arguably most clearly seen in the young researcher collecting information and writing their thesis. Even if a senior professor provides income support and general research 'problem', he/she who does the work owns it. Ownership is almost exclusively individual rather than team. There are reasons for such a view. The intellectual curiosity channeled through a paradigmatic prism that defines a particular research problem is ultimately that of the individual researcher even if the work is closely linked to others within a research team. Researchers are socialized to treat their work as private, to be used primarily as inputs for as many peer reviewed papers and books as possible. Co-authored papers and books are only worth fifty percent on the academic scorecard and thereby requiring twice the work for equivalent recognition. Thus, only when either sufficiently established or a powerless research neophyte does one look favorably upon eight other authors on their journal article. Even then it is best to avoid being further down the author list than second or third since order is generally assumed to reflect proportion of effort! Research teams are encouraged, but most often as a system of mentoring pairing senior and junior researchers. Ownership and associated status is zealously guarded, however, at least until such time as it really is not seen as important for attaining further rewards.

⁵ See Howard S. Becker, "Problems of Inference and Proof in Participant Observation". *American Sociological Review*. 23:652-60. Note as well the plethora of qualitative software premised on principles of scientific discovery such as Nudist, Ethnograph, etc.

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Once enshrined, the entire reward structure of academia is maintained through the well-known process of ‘peer review’ in which ones work is judged by others presumably committed to the same objective standards as the researcher. This system resides within a university structure providing almost daily affirmation. Rewards in the form of tenure, promotion, research grant competition and publication, at least half of which are dispensed by universities themselves, are judged in terms of not only the ‘fashionableness’ of the research topic and paradigm but adherence to scientific criteria as well. Career success ensures subsequent success as academic records come to be assessed not only on present performance on these criteria but history as well. Thus, one publication ‘record’ and granting ‘record’ live on long after articles are published or grants secured. Research questions of an applied nature judged to be drawn from public sentiment or concern may gather attention and suggest a demand for a specific research avenue but academic gold is clearly encrusted intellectual curiosity linked to some particular theoretical paradigm and examined with some sort of scientific procedure. As a colleague of one of us once said:

“Promotion to full professor is a reward for lots of small, elegant partial answers to large questions that hardly anyone other than other professors gives a hoot about! Relevance may make one feel good, but near ascetic commitment to research minutiae gets professorships and research chairs!”

The above is, of course, something of a caricature. What Max Weber might have called an ideal type⁶. In other words, it is an exaggeration but has just enough truth to be useful as a standard for comparison. But academia is nothing if not intellectually tolerant and diverse. Tolerances can and have taken many forms with varying levels of official and unofficial encouragement. An important, encouraged activity was applied, practical and relevant research. In a limited number of cases, this encouragement even found institutional expression within academia and is almost certainly one of the foundations of what is now more widely known as community-based research. From the earliest formative years of the disciplines, however, it has been a secondary focus, particularly as

⁶ See Gerth, H and Mills, C.W. (1967). From Max Weber. Glencoe: Glencoe University Press for a discussion of Ideal types and their analytical uses.

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disciplinary identities emerged with growing universities. The story of this is interesting and relevant although we can only provide perfunctory coverage here.

Several social sciences arose, at least in part, as attempts to understand and potentially mitigate what were perceived as undesirable features of their societies. Sociology provides an obvious illustration beginning as an enlightenment-based response to the pervasive disruption, disorganization and suffering associated with the early industrial revolution in Europe. Students and faculty alike still review the works of Marx, Weber, Durkheim and their contemporaries searching for insights into today's society. Imbued with enlightenment beliefs in progress, human rationality, and a belief in the scientific method each of the founders saw himself in largely positivist terms and sought explanations with similar logic. One might be a personal activist but the path to that activism's end was to be understood in these terms. Despite contemporary challenges from social constructivism, feminism and post modernism in its multitudinous forms, most contemporary sociological investigation is still a reasonably direct descendant of these classical 'fathers'. If not, it would make little sense to continuously read, teach and revere them as is done in contemporary university study.

Despite their commitment to impartial, objective research, in their own respective ways, the classical founders saw themselves as 'activists' utilizing the rationalist tools of enlightenment science to discover the workings of emergent industrial capitalism so that they might either radically transform it (Marx), mitigate its dysfunctional, anomic features (Durkheim) or promote its more progressive features as tools of collective betterment (Weber)⁷.

Though usually associated with European social science where the founders resided, activism was arguably as strong, albeit more micro-focused, in North America⁸. From its formal beginnings in 1892 at the University of Chicago, significant amounts of

⁷ For insights into the classical sociologists more 'activist' activities see Westby, D. 1991. *The Growth of Sociological Theory: Human Nature, Knowledge and Social Change*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall. And F. Pampel. 2000. *Sociological Lives and Ideas: An Introduction to the Classical Theorists*. Word Publishers.

⁸ See Swingewood, A. 2000. *A Short History of Sociological Thought* New York: St. Martins Press.

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sociology were imbued with an amalgam of more general theory and a profound desire to use knowledge resulting from research for practical, beneficial ends. Whether the topic was crime and social disorganization, homelessness, poverty or humanizing and normalizing deviance much work was imbued with the hope that sociological research could improve society. In the 1930's work by researchers such as Mayo⁹ and others in the so-called 'human relations' tradition, while clear supporters of private capitalism, undertook research on sociological factors critical to higher productivity at least in part to improve the lives of workers. During the second world war and through to the early 1960's, several research areas and paradigm emerged driven at least in part by practical concerns linked to understanding leadership and mass persuasion in democracies. The work of Paul Lazerfeld at Columbia University focusing upon collective behavior and reference group identification is probably best known as is the 'transplanted' work of the Frankfurt School¹⁰ following World War II.

In the 1960's and 70's, sociology, along with its sister disciplines of social psychology, political science, cultural anthropology and institutional economics was marshaled by Western states into the battle to bring democracy, freedom and modernization (not necessarily in that order) to non-western countries as a means of thwarting perceived communist encroachment. Understanding the essential processes of modernization and finding ways to effectively implement the process directly and indirectly became major areas of funded research. Indeed, many senior academics such as WW Rostow, Daniel Moynihan, Daniel Lerner, Gunnar Myrdal and others¹¹ shuttled back and froth from government bureaucracy to university classroom. Terms such as 'economic take off', traditionalism and underdevelopment moved seamlessly from esoteric research papers through government policy documents to implementation in remote villages of the so-called 'third world.' By the late 1960's counter, discrediting paradigms were emerging as well drawing on the works of Marx, Lenin and numerous empirical studies demonstrating the inequalities and dysfunctionality associated with

⁹ See Mayo, E. *Management and the Worker*

¹⁰ See Adorno, T. *The Authoritarian Personality* and Lazarsfeld, P.

¹¹ See WW Rostow. 1967 *The Stages of Economic Growth*; D. Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society*; Gunnar Myrdal *Rich Nations and Poor Nations*; Daniel Moynihan, *the Culture of Poverty*.

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imposing modernization, particularly a single, largely a historical one. Andre Gunder Frank¹² was the most recognizable proponent of this view.

The late 1960's was also a period of unprecedented activism, much of it at the community level. While small groups had most likely always undertaken specific, practical research to address issues of pressing concern, the North American 'War on Poverty' introduced a new form of applied social research, community action based inquiry, closely linked to social reform. Modern state treasuries allocated what were then enormous levels of funds in its support. Solutions to high unemployment, high levels of illiteracy, job creation, juvenile delinquency and a host of other poverty-related conditions were thought to require good social science research for their eradication as reasons for their persistence dramatically shifted from personal culpability to institutional and structural factors in the very organization of society, or in the famous phrase of C. Wright Mills in 'public issues rather than personal troubles'¹³.

While many academic researchers played important roles in establishing and promoting various forms of community research, with a few notable exceptions such as Cloward, Piven,¹⁴ and several conspicuous others, this was done well within the umbrella of more traditional academic work. That is, it was either justified through location in dominant disciplinary paradigms or undertaken through contract or secondment. Their academic careers were either built elsewhere or this work couched in sufficient theoretical and methodological sophistication that it could pass muster (though not necessarily controversy) amongst academic peers. Practical research was extensive but typically marginal to mainstream, professional social science.

Several factors fueled this expansion in practical research loosely affiliated to academia. Responding to funding incentives flowing from the War on Poverty, new research institutes (many university/community hybrids at least in the beginning) arose as an arm of low-income neighborhood organizations and co-operatives. A steady supply of

¹² See Andre Gunder Frank. *Development and Underdevelopment in Latin America*.

¹³ See C. Wright Mills. *The Sociological Imagination: An Introduction to Sociology*.

¹⁴ See Cloward, P. and Piven, F. 1971. *Regulating the Poor*. New York:Pantheon and

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state funding and an increasing supply of idealistic university graduates with some level of social research expertise provided a plentiful supply of researchers at comparatively low cost. Neighborhood and community socio-economic profiles were replicated across thousands of neighborhoods and communities, urban and rural. Community 'need assessments' became standard research practices and many university departments offered 'practical' apprenticeships for credit to interested students. University professors frequently provided research advice but seldom built their careers on output from their community work.

In Canada, a similar expansion occurred. Arguably the most extensive development of community-based research occurred in the province of Quebec. Under the banner of 'animation sociale' or 'social action/animation', extensive community research capacity developed in both urban and rural areas drawing on university expertise in disciplines as wide-ranging as business and sociology. Gradually, people and organizations undertaking community research crafted at least semi-autonomous research capacity to address the more direct, practical questions that they increasingly required answers to.

Shifting government philosophies during the 1980's and 1990's with their attendant decrease in spending, paradoxically, served both to strengthen as well as constrain emergent community-based research. State retrenchment and deficit prioritization reduced programs and funding that had previously fueled much of the community research. On the other hand, offloading former government responsibilities created new demands for localized programs of delivery and relevant research in their support. More stringent justification for government expenditures was similarly a two edged phenomenon. Accountability required evidence and justification. In England under Conservative and later Labour governments, more progressive interpretations were placed on this process. Evidence Based Decision Making (EBDM), much of it devolved to local levels, was seen not only as good, conservative fiscal management but, in a wider vein, as progressive and empowering. Increasingly, EBDM has been intellectually coupled with local participation as a foundation of government policy with many

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community based research enterprises surviving, even prospering, from the multitude of research contracts available from varying levels of government and/or government agencies, either by themselves or by ‘partnering’ with non-academic research consultants. The funding levels, terms of reference and, particularly, their short ‘turn around’ time discourage many academics from investing the time to pursue them. The result today is that there exists in virtually every country two institutional configurations of social research with some overlap but considerable distinctiveness. On the one hand are community based research institutes funded largely through direct and indirect government grants and contracts. While some find at least a partial home in universities, many, perhaps most, are largely autonomous. While individual university researchers often play periodic roles in specific research projects, their community research contributions are seen as secondary for their university advancement. The other configuration consists of university researchers, increasingly in teams linking two or more disciplines undertaking research often draped in practical relevance but driven and rewarded primarily by its relevance and methodological sophistication within one or more theoretical paradigms. Community relevance and practical assistance is not eschewed but neither is it passionately sought. While it is easy to overdraw the distinctions between these two quite different research styles and the cultures within which each is embedded, it is important to note their existence since movement between the two is less than transparent and not without some difficulty.

There are several relevant points we wish to draw from this admittedly brief and incomplete history of academic social research.

- There is a long tradition of publicly relevant, ‘applied’ social research dating to the origins of most social science disciplines in both Europe and North America.
- The pursuit of applied work has always been secondary to considerations of intellectual curiosity embedded in particular theoretical paradigms.
- Academic research as an activity is embedded in a distinctive culture with its own values, norms and roles. One of the elements of this culture of relevance to our discussion is ownership or the belief that researchers alone own their work. Co-operation can and does occur but usually with some amount of suspicion and reluctance. Equal research partnerships are rare.

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- Applied research has been of distinctly secondary importance in gaining access to academic rewards such as tenure, promotion, etc. While providing increased income through consulting, it has been best seen as possibly tipping the balance towards a favorable outcome when professional criteria are marginal.

Nowhere has this view of research been more entrenched than in the United States as sociology strove to achieve professional status.¹⁵ With this overview of academic social science we now turn to a consideration of what is termed community-based social research or CBR.

Community-based Research: An Overview

Community-based research is a broad term referring to all types of research conducted by community members, with the aim of informing themselves and others about an issue and thereby empowering ordinary citizens to effect social change. Many different research trends have contributed to the development of CBR, and depending on the background of the researchers involved, many different terms may be used to describe the specific type of CBR being done. Some terms that have been used to describe variations of CBR with the same underlying aim of informing and empowering citizens include participatory action research¹⁶, community action research¹⁷, and collaborative inquiry¹⁸. It is best understood as a continuum of research strategies sharing certain core features but varying in many other respects. What underlies all varieties of CBR is a holistic, typically multidisciplinary perspective meaningfully involving community members aimed at empowering them for securing directed change. While some research characteristics are shared with academic research, a number of important differences are also acknowledged.

CBR is arguably best understood through its scope, strategies and organizational

¹⁵ There are numerous sources for this. A particularly elegant statement is to be found in Howard S. Becker's short essay entitled "Professional Sociology: The Case of C. Wright Mills on Mills" found at <http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/faculty/hbecker/mills.html> Also see I. Horowitz. 1983. *C. Wright Mills: an American Utopian*. New York: The Free Press.

¹⁶ PARnet. Retrieved May 19, 2004 from <http://www.parnet.org>.

¹⁷ Senge, P. and Scharmer, O. 2000. "Community Action Research". In Reason, P. and Bradbury, H. Eds.. *Handbook of Action Research*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

¹⁸ Kakabadse, A. and Kakabadse, N. 2002. Making 'modernising government initiatives' Work: Culture Change Through Collaborative Inquiry (CI)." *Public Administration and Development*. 22,337-52.

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linkages. The following emerge as the most important defining requirements from both literature reviews and our informal surveying of colleagues. Once again, we present this overview as a generalized view mindful that, as with academic research, community research is similarly far from monolithic and displays probably as much variation as its academic cousin. Since we have already presented a highly abbreviated historical overview of its development, we will only discuss its central defining characteristics here.

Community-based research is defined by its practitioners as highly integrated or holistic. Ideally, an important objective of CBR is the complete and interdependent understanding of the social processes associated with the research question(s). Such a 'holistic' approach is favorably contrasted, by its proponents, with more segmented approaches in much academic research in which a 'manageable problem' is isolated with a theory and studied. The integration of many such research pieces becomes the task of 'meta researchers' in future work.

A holistic approach requires multiple perspectives with diverse methodologies and several sources of information or data. For this reason CBR promotes multiple methodologies, both quantitative and qualitative, from a wide range of paradigmatic and disciplinary approaches. Depending on the research question(s), research strategies may include methods such as archival analysis, economic and demographic indicators, surveys, interviews, case studies, ethnomethodology, and even experiments or quasi-experiments can be useful. Data 'triangulation' or multiple types of independent data to confirm or disconfirm a finding as well as unobtrusive methods are heavily promoted¹⁹.

Holism and multiple perspectives require meaningful collaboration. In other words, both require for their successful implementation a structure and culture of openness and equality. Such a structure and culture encourages dialogue and respectful criticism by all members of the research team without fear of consequences regardless of training, research experience or status. Such openness is required from the establishing

¹⁹ Webb, R., Campbell, D. Schwartz, R.D. and Stanley Unobtrusive Measures in social Research

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of research question(s) through all subsequent steps of the work including writing of results.

CBR is avowedly practical and problem solving in its formulation and achievement of research. Research is best understood not as answers to intellectual and paradigmatic curiosities but as levers of social change. While outcomes may inform theories and paradigms, the primary objective remains to effect social change. Research findings are judged primarily in terms of how useful they are for informing the actions of community members and developing social policy rather than how elegant the research design and dazzling the interpretive process.

Community research is avowedly and unabashedly partisan. It is done in the name of one or more 'community(ies)' and eschews any claim to being value free. Since a primary aim of CBR is to achieve some preferred social condition, values command an important role throughout the research process. Having said this, it is nonetheless felt critical that interpretive rules are replicable and transparent. In other words, partisanship should not exempt research from consensually transparent rules of evidence and perhaps even the condition of falsifiability²⁰.

In this approach it is critical that research undertaken be fully understandable by the community with which and for which it is done. In the last twenty-five years, social researchers have gained considerable understanding regarding the relationship between researchers and subjects of research. Subjects of research are today viewed as more than 'data objects' or 'carriers of information' or 'vectors of pathologic spread', to use a phrase heard on television in discussing returning visitors to Canada who had been in Southern China during the SARS epidemic. Rather, those who provide information must be seen as human beings with extensive rights flowing from the research relationship. Some of these rights include obvious things such as protection from harm or use of information provided in confidence for financial and personal gain by the researcher(s). Ethical codes, informant/researcher contracts and similar elements are now common parts

²⁰ See Gillian Janes. "Evidence Based Decision Making: A History and Application". Paper prepared for Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, May 2001.

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of research on human subjects either as individuals or communities. While such views are now applicable to virtually all research situations, it is even more critical in CBR since the research process is defined as a transparent and equal one. Moreover, collaboration must be wider than those, frequently few, individuals that provide information and data to the research team. This is most commonly achieved with ongoing dialogue and communication through public meetings, focus groups, research status reports and other similar venues with as many members of the relevant community(ies) as possible.

An important criterion for judging the success of research is the extent to which it is practical i.e. implies clear action decisions with widely applicable results: As CBR tends to deal with pressing social issues, the research results will be sought after and utilized by many citizens, organizations and groups (Sclove, Scammell, & Holland, 1998). A corollary of practical results is the need to widely disseminate findings. In contrast to academic research, which tends to be disseminated through academic journals, seminars, and lectures aimed at specific, typically limited, audiences, CBR findings should be disseminated to a wide array of community members, organizations and the general public. This is normally done through a wide array of media including public presentations, news releases, and research networks. If results are to find their way into the wider public, presentation needs to be clear, concise, and jargon-free in substance and style.

Time and financial resources are highly valued in community-based research. As the primary aim of CBR is to effect social change, it is important that the costs of the research not be more than the benefits resulting from it. As well, a premium should be attached to the required time to undertake research. Implementable, timely and cost effective are three major criteria in judging the success of a research undertaking (and even deciding whether to do the research initially). Given that community groups typically must struggle for funding, any funds directed towards a particular research project must always be assessed against alternative uses for the resources, both financial and human. Because of these pressures, CBR is usually considered more cost-effective

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than traditional academic research. This is most often measured in the range of outputs and completion time for the size of the financial allocation²¹.

The quintessential objective of CBS is community empowerment. CBR empowers communities through providing expertise and confidence to establish research and control agendas to find solutions to social and environmental problems of heightened concern to them and through this process participate more effectively in shaping the environment in which they live²². This is achieved not only by the social changes that the knowledge generated by the research enables, but also through increasing feelings of self-confidence, social inclusion, autonomy and control, and the development of numerous forms of social capital.

As with our discussion of academic undertakings, community research similarly develops its own research culture to legitimate its objectives and institutions. While the extent to which any particular example of community based research meets all of these objectives varies for reasons probably not dissimilar from academic research, the characterization outlined here and its attendant culture is widely understood as a model to be striven for even if actual undertakings may fall short in various ways due to specific circumstances. In this respect, it is not dissimilar from academic research.

Academic and Community-based Research: Comparisons and Contrasts

As we indicated, the characterizations outlined are, in important respects, 'ideal types'²³. In other words they are analytically 'pure' characterizations from which it is easy to highlight essential similarities and differences. As such they represent conceptual reference points from which differences of varying consequence may follow depending upon how far from the pure form any actual piece of research lies. With this in mind, it is useful to explore potential areas of misunderstanding and potential conflict.

²¹ Sclove, R. E., Scammell, M.L. and Holland, B. 1998. Community based Research in the United States. The Loka Institute, Amherst, MA.

²² See, for a typical statement, preamble to The Community Research Network, Retrieved on May 27, 2004 from <http://www.loka.org/crn>.

²³ See Gerth, H. and Mills, C.W. 1967. From Max Weber. Glencoe, Illinois: Aldine.

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At the most general level academic and community-based research exists within quite different research cultures as we have indicated. Cultures refer to the values, norms, and roles within which research behavior occurs. Cultures represent moral orders as well, within which evaluations of external activities are assessed. Our brief discussion of the two approaches to research suggests numerous points of contrast. Table 1 summarizes some of these.

Table 1: Contrasts in Research Discourse and Strategy

Academic Research	Community-based Research
Curiosity/paradigm driven	Practical, problem driven
Individual/small group	Team
Focused	General/holistic
'Objective'	Partisan
Knowledge driven	Action driven
Restricted ownership data	Community ownership data
Informing	Informing for Empowerment
Medium to long term	Short term
Paradigm specific language	Ordinary language
Other academics (peer review)	Multiple publics
'Peer review' evaluation	Community acceptance/effectiveness
Separate ethical review outside of research	Integration of Ethical dimension into research
Largely restricted to academic funding agencies (changing)	Access to large number of government and Foundation sources
Integrated research careers on single or related 'problems'	Eclectic research pattern due to need to continuously fund overhead costs

These contrasts may affect any part of a research relationship, from problem definition through data collection and analysis to decisions on dissemination. In the following section we draw heavily from our colleagues answers to the questions posed at the paper's beginning to suggest ways of avoiding misunderstanding if not outright conflict.

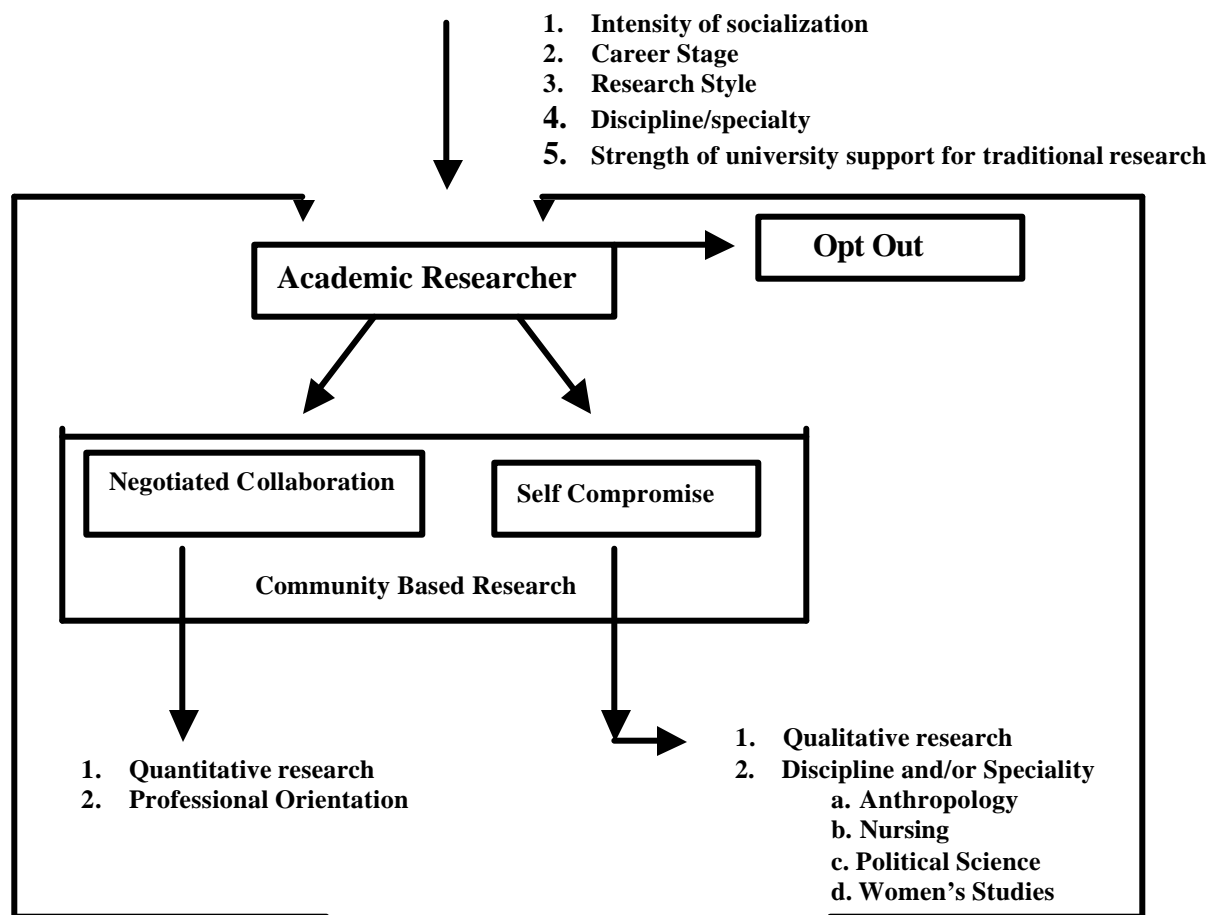
Strategies and Facilitators for Collaboration

Considering the potential for misunderstanding, if not outright conflict, that underlies some of the technical, substantive and cultural differences in the two

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approaches, it is surprising that considerable collaboration across research cultures occurs relatively unproblematically. Several factors most likely contribute to this. Diagram 1 summarizes what we believe to be the major ones. As suggested with the ‘feed back’ arrows, most, if not all, are interdependent and reinforcing.

Diagram 1. Academic Participation in Community Research



For reasons most likely due to personality, professional socialization or more likely some combination, many academic researchers eschew participation with community-based researchers. For these, research is largely a private undertaking based on his/her curiosity within some subject area. Even if the intent is applied in some sense, it is likely to be undertaken either in ‘private’ or within a small university-bound, single discipline research team. A critical element of academic research culture is the sanctity of one’s own research, even if encased in a paradigm or grant belonging to someone else—

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usually a more senior researcher in the latter instance. As we have indicated, university rewards serve to reinforce this view. In their view, equality throughout the research process associated with community research is a condition they are unwilling to meet for a variety of reasons.

Happily for advocates of greater research collaboration, many other researchers approach collaborative research in a more conciliatory, if cautious and opportunistic, way. For them, various strategies of accommodation are not only possible but also desirable. A range of adaptations and accommodations can be observed depending upon the researcher, his/her specialization, and the degree to which the form of community-based research deviates from the pure type presented. At one end are those researchers providing expertise in exchange for access to data otherwise difficult to collect. For them, collaboration is akin to a formalized contract in which each side receives an advantage. This is commonly done in a friendly, co-operative manner but at the end of the day, neither shares much of the overall research process. It is a marriage of need and convenience. A colleague expresses it thus:

“ I believe in community research even though most of my interests don't necessarily have any direct applicability to what a community thinks it needs or wants. If I have skills or experience that can assist communities I think it's terrific. . . . Usually, I just ask them if I can also collect some information for some research of my own. Unless it is unusually sensitive, they usually say yes and don't ask any questions. I may come back and review some of their work but that's it.”

Something of an intermediate accommodation occurs when the researcher immerses him/herself in joint research and in so doing tries to balance their needs with that of the community and its researchers. For them, it is something of an ongoing struggle to find a balance between academic and community expectations and needs. Typically, this may be better understood as some degree of internal conflict in how the planning, conducting, analyzing and reporting of research is achieved. If the research site, and perhaps some of the research questions, are embedded in political disputes, the conflict may be more intense. Where research is more qualitative such as ethnography or participant observation, the issue is arguably even more real since such research places a

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premium on two-way communication i.e. informants provide information and share their hospitality and time while the researcher shares him/herself, their research findings and even their knowledge of the larger society in hopes it will be of some assistance and compensation for the informants time, effort and sacrifices. In the words of another colleague:

“Thus, in approaching any research I seem to arrive at the solution of undertaking to do two things- what the ‘community’, or individuals there who I get to know, wants and needs, as well as what I find is intellectually challenging and rewarding, and what the discipline is most likely to reward me for doing. In different projects, different ratios of attention between these two aspects of research are struck, but not always in a way that might at first seem obvious.”

Some version of this balancing of academic and community research is probably most common.

A third, more integrative form, of research collaboration is also occasionally found. It envisions most, if not all, research stages as negotiated and shared equally. Moreover, the research team is more egalitarian than hierarchical in deliberation and decision-making. In this accommodation, both research cultures are recognized for their strengths as well as weaknesses and a synergy develops drawing on the strengths of each without displacing one by the other. Several granting agencies elevate this form as an ideal. While we know of no way to measure the frequency of this option, or for that matter the other two, our own experience suggests we are still some ways from it though considerable movement has occurred in recent years. Many instances of form two evolving towards form three may occur in the future. It represents a level of integration to be sought though perhaps not easily achieved. It most likely pushes collaboration to its ultimate degree while recognizing the desirability and, most likely the inevitability, of maintaining separate identities for academic and community-based research. Exactly how close to such a research relationship is possible will probably depend upon how willing each party is to accommodate the differences of the other in actual research co-operation. In the real world of research, we are not sure how practical or even desirable it is to pursue some variety of this collaboration. Our recommendations at the end of the paper are offered as more general suggestions fostering, we hope, greater co-operation, understanding and collaboration without presupposing the actual penultimate forms (for there will surely be more than one) they might take.

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It would be tempting to think of these outcomes as additive and forming something of increasingly collaborative patterns of academic/community research partnerships. The contrary perspective that each is a quite distinct outcome with little or no probability of movement to another is equally lightly. What is reasonably clear, however, is that certain structural and institutional factors do appear to be linked to some degree with each outcome. Among these are academic seniority and rank, gender, and department and/or specialization. We briefly explore each of these in turn.

The title of our paper suggests that senior academics, defined in terms of rank and career, likely entangled in age, are in need of assistance i.e. ‘new tricks’, if they are to comfortably participate in some version of our third form of collaboration. This is a tempting argument if we think of senior academics as less flexible, curmudgeonly individuals—more male than female—resistant to change. Empirically, academic career stage might either impede or facilitate greater collaboration. Senior academic researchers have typically progressed as far as they will. One consequence might be that whatever conforming pressure might exist regarding academic-based rules is less compelling. Later stage academics are potentially freer to pursue research, if they undertake research at all, relatively unconstrained by traditional assessment. Conversely, older academic researchers have had much more extensive exposure to academic research styles and practiced them for extended periods. Thus, it may be difficult to disassociate themselves from the hierarchical organization, smaller team size, single or dual discipline focus, and paradigmatic commitment. In this sense, it may indeed be more difficult to teach older academics a new mindset as well as new methods, a more expansive multidisciplinary focus, commitment to more egalitarian teamwork and a practical focus necessary for effective community collaboration. Frankly, we know instances that fit both outcomes. For those willing to explore community-based research, our recommendations provide a path.

Without introducing considerations of gender and discipline, it is difficult to make any persuasive generalizations on which direction senior academics may tend. If we were

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forced to predict, it would probably be that academic career status does NOT provide any particular incentive for greater collaboration. Until relatively recent emphases upon ‘agency’ or the capacity to act, resist and even transform the organizational constraints that entrap and direct us all, most sociologists, following the classical view, were likely to see history, socialization and organizational membership as the walls of our imprisonment in history (to borrow Peter Berger’s²⁴ famous phrase) and find it difficult to throw off the weighty influence of their entire professional careers. Outside of specific parts of universities with explicit ‘community links’ (most of which, until recently were of distinctly secondary status in the university status hierarchy), universities provided little specific incentives for this research path. For this reason, it is likely that more senior academics will, generally speaking, require some assistance and support if they are to collaborate in any form other than the first version discussed above. In the conclusion we offer some suggestions as to how this might be achieved.

It is difficult to discuss any contribution of the researcher’s gender independent of their career stage and discipline. Until relatively recently, women have been considerably underrepresented in the core social sciences of anthropology, sociology, political science, social psychology and political economy. Intellectually related professional fields such as nursing and social work have not, until the last ten to fifteen years, developed strong independent research traditions focusing instead upon professional and clinical preparation with empirical research a decidedly secondary issue. More multidisciplinary substantive foci, typically called ‘Studies’ as opposed to departments, such as Women’s Studies, Native Studies or Afro-American Studies are also new with much younger research traditions. Many, if not most, of these latter programs are avowedly collaborative though even here it would be extremely interesting to see how close many, if not most, achieve the model of collaborative research as expressed in the literature we surveyed earlier. While several colleagues have suggested that women for a wide range of cultural and perhaps even genetic reasons, may have less adjustment in accommodating themselves and their research in such collaborative settings, we think a more useful and certainly more sociological discussion of this can be

²⁴ See Peter Berger. *Invitation to Sociology*. New York: Penguin Books. 1967.

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gained through understanding issues of gender within a larger discussion of university research organization, specifically by examining enabling and constraining features within disciplines and programs of interdisciplinary study as well as methodological styles dominant within them.

If career stage matters in bridging academic and community research, disciplinary affiliation and research style probably matter at least as much. We have already mentioned the quite different relationship between researcher and research subject underlying most forms of field or qualitative research. In some forms, equality and even empowerment for the information provider are explicit though actual practice may vary. The contrast between these forms and research styles in which individuals or communities are essentially passive providers of information is palpable and relevant to the nature of the relationship not only between data collector and subject, but also the wider one between community-based researchers and academics. This is not to suggest that more distancing research styles such as survey or secondary data research using census or other available sources precludes more intimate research relations but rather that more effort should probably be extended to ensure that any relationship beyond what we described as type 1 eventually emerges.

Our informal survey suggests some disciplines more easily bridge academic and at least some forms of community based research than others. Political science, due in part to its long history in voting behavior and public policy, possesses a history of various forms of bridging. In contrast to governments, however, community groups and researchers are:

“More likely to need help refining their research needs and plans in language academics understand. . . .The cost for academics that comes from doing community based research is that it can be hard to translate into publications.”

The same informant goes on to make a substantive link between his/her discipline and

community-based research:

“A final point that may make community-based research accessible to political science is the easy reach from civil society to community organizations. Having a conceptual entry point makes taking on this sort of activity relatively comfortable and plausible. It can even provide the conceptual shoehorn that lets you convert applied, problem solving work into something with enough theoretical bite to get into a journal.”

An even closer relationship may exist in more clinically based professional programs such as nursing (though typically not in the highest status programs such as medicine). As one of our colleagues states:

“Nursing often uses the term ‘community-based’ to imply that the idea was generated by the identified community in consultation with the researchers. This approach helps to build community development and capacity to identify and address issues of concern. . . although the idea (in a particular instance) began with the academics, the research methodology and instruments were developed with input from the community or in this case an advisory committee with representatives from key areas.”

Our informant continues to suggest even more integrated collaboration:

“Another area of distinction is the development and implementation of the actual study. ‘Community-based research’ should involve key stake holders through all phases of the research process, beginning with the development of the proposal through to the discussion and recommendations arising from the research. . . community research should help to build research capacity within the community.”

Conversations with other CURA projects in Canada reinforced the extent that professional schools such as nursing and social work extensively promote similar forms of collaborative research. Indeed, it is probably an accurate generalization that collaboration has gone further in several professional schools, excluding law and medicine we expect, than in most traditional academic social science environments.

One possible exception to the above generalization is the ‘Studies’ programs mentioned earlier. While a history of their place and mandate within social science is far too extensive to discuss here, their general commitment to multidisciplinary and their purposive links to the larger society (particularly their referent group be they gender, race

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or ethnicity) would also seem to encourage more extensive research linkages. In many Studies programs, empowerment, partisan and practical objectives are manifest. It would be interesting and extremely informative to systematically look at several such programs and determine whether they are in fact more likely to build effective links to their constituent communities and if so how this was accomplished. It would also be interesting to follow similar programs to see if their relationship to community changes as their status in the university 'pecking order' rises.

Talking the Talk and Walking the Walk: Suggestions for closer Collaboration

Our arguments in this paper are premised on the conviction that greater collaboration between academic and community based researchers is mutually advantageous and, with very few exceptions, the degree of collaboration can be increased. As well, such collaboration should be founded on an acknowledgement that the two types of research are quite different, co-operation potentially tense and finally that some formal assimilation is neither possible nor desirable. Each type of research possesses strengths and limitations that may potentially serve to increase the acceptability and credibility of research undertaken in the name of a community(ies). The primary objective, however, is to combine the research traditions to maximize the likelihood that research done under in the name of some community(ies) draws from the strengths of each²⁵. To maximize this a number of changes in both perception and practice should be considered by both types of researchers as well as the larger communities. Four strike us as particularly relevant.

1. *Mutually toning down what is all too often self-serving, condescending rhetoric.*

Even where researchers of both types co-operate reasonably effectively, they too often do so with a background of misunderstanding if not outright distrust. Even the most sympathetic academic researcher to community based work is likely to harbor some

²⁵ A particularly useful Canadian workshop on this is the Cuexpo workshop held in Saskatchewan in 2003. See URL located at <http://usask.ca/cuistr/cuexpo/>

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level of perception of community research as inferior as a result of their disciplinary socialization. Community-based research questions are trivial (or worse yet self evident), methodologies sloppy and analysis superficial. In turn, academic research is too theoretical, socially irrelevant and sufficiently obtuse and jargon-laden to be unintelligible. The self-righteousness of many such utterings merely serves to reinforce respective stereotypes. What is needed instead is a more open and accepting acknowledgment of differences by both sides as a starting point from which to build collaboration. One way in which this can be achieved is through our second suggestion, orientation workshops.

2. Orientation workshops.

The primary objectives of this workshop(s) should be more detailed understanding of the two research styles and their cultures. Ideally, one or more should be organized prior to any planned research to increase the likelihood of reasonably equal participation through out the research. From the vantage point of academic research, three specific objectives should be pursued. The first should be a frank discussion of the similarities and differences of the two types of research. The discussion should strive to explain why academic research so frequently appears to lack closure i.e. why it appears to raise more questions than it answers and thus may seem impractical, even irrelevant, to the daily concerns of community members (see quote at beginning of paper) as well as other seemingly archaic features such as specialized, insider language. On the community side, this first objective should include why certain types of information are collected (for government grants or accounting procedures, to respond to ‘problem’ concerns, etc.) and other information is not (“We already know that, etc.!”).

The second objective should be to fully inform each type of researcher on how the other’s research is done through taking them through each step from problem generation, data collection tools, standards for analysis and evaluation as well as publication forms and outlets. Ideally, this should be done while informing the audience of the larger constraints-- political, temporal and economic—within which each type of research is undertaken and assessed. We expect this can be most effectively done through concrete

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illustration using a specific piece of research. Selection of the research examples as well as presenters for both research types is critical. It is best done with people knowledgeable and sympathetic with both forms of research.

The third objective is to demonstrate mutual relevance of the respective work. In our experience, an effective way of doing this from the academic side is to provide examples that demonstrate what academics call the ‘serendipitous nature’ of research relevance. In ordinary language, this simply means that one should not judge the practical relevance of a particular piece of research solely from an immediate and direct perspective. In the words of one of our informants:

“But research, in the broader sense of inquiring into the causes of things, looking at the implications and results of things, for this kind of real open research we have to set aside initial expectations of usefulness, and simply try to open up the inquiry. Finding the usefulness only comes later.”

Most academic researchers, particularly those with extensive research careers, have encountered numerous examples of what we might call ‘after the fact’ relevance. In our experience in undertaking community-based research we have encountered many reciprocal examples as well in which community initiated research was useful in addressing more theoretical, paradigm driven academic work.

At the workshop’s conclusion, numerous emergent linkages should be stressed. Participants should recognize that there are myriad ways of framing questions for research and that linkages between seemingly esoteric questions and everyday life oft times just need to be probed. Research opportunities do not simply present themselves in a single way. To once again quote the above informant:

“Perhaps this is because the human mind is limited in the way it can perceive reality, but it seems we have to frame reality in one specific way, and in so doing we have to set aside other possible ways at looking at the same issue. The notion that ‘we already know what the problem is and how to deal with it’ suggests that a frame for looking at the problem is already there. I am suggesting that any particular frame is only adequate for its own purposes, and within its own terms of reference. But there are always other frames, other possible ways of

looking at reality.”²⁶

Great care must be exercised in selecting presenters for such a workshop since collaboration can be nurtured or undermined by the presentations. One suggestion is to use ‘seasoned’ presenters from each type of research with some experience in ‘bridging’. Successfully undertaken, one or more orientation workshops can serve to undermine invidious stereotypes as well as promote increased good will and understanding.

3. Writing and Analysis Workshops.

In our view workshops can help set moods and potentially take the bite out of possible disagreements. Meaningful collaboration also requires joint, practical action. Co-operatively drafting of proposals and grant applications, setting up research designs, collecting and analyzing data and writing up findings in reports and articles. Different skills are associated for each research style. The envisioned workshops build on the orientation workshops by providing ‘hands on’ experience. There are several ways to structure such a workshop. We have experienced some in which conscious role reversals were encouraged requiring people to ‘walk a mile (or at least a few pages) in the other’s intellectual shoes’ while others promoted ‘team’ efforts in which participants from each style were paired to produce research statements of interest to both types of research consumers. Other strategies such as having representatives from one type of research ‘translate’ the work from the other into their own language. At the end of the workshop, participants shared their efforts and reported back to the entire group on their experiences.

It is unrealistic to expect seamless collaboration from a single such effort. It is probably better to have several workshops on different parts of the research process starting with problem statement/funding proposal authoring and holding any additional workshops as the need arises during the life of any collaboration. As with the orientation workshop, careful attention must be given to the leaders. We have not tried to specify

²⁶ . Presentation at “widening the Circle Conference Panel on Research. 1998. In Oblin, Caroline, Kirmayer, L, Gill, K and Robinson, E. Eds. Widening the Circle: Collaborative Research for Mental Health Promotion in Native Communities. Proceedings of a Conference organized by the Culture and Mental Health Research Unit. Montreal, McGill University.

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workshop size since it might vary considerably depending upon the parties and size of the research agenda.

4. Establish Joint Research Mentoring programs.

A limited number of workshops, by themselves, provide a fruitful foundation towards greater collaboration. It is essential, however, that ongoing relationships be established that maintain and reinforce workshop benefits. One strategy to this end is what might be called a 'joint mentoring' program in which two or more researchers from the two research traditions collaborate on an ongoing basis. Care should be given to ensure that one view does not dominate over the other. This may require matching partners on experience, status or other relevant factors. It is also useful to have some structured 'feedback' processes in place to a coordinating committee or the larger research group to assist in handling any problems as well as promote particularly useful results. Some instances of mentoring involve a fairly formalized rotation at various times as well. There are a variety of ways in which implementation can occur and some trial and error is both useful and necessary.

Conclusion

Academic and community-based research represents different ways of thinking about as well as undertaking social research. While numerous areas of tension are possible between the two, particularly where communities are highly politicized and highly cynical as a result of high levels of 'use' by traditional academic research. Despite, or perhaps because of their differences, there are advantages in investigative depth and credibility to be gained from meaningful collaboration between the two. While varying degrees of collaboration currently exist, particularly in academic professional schools and interdisciplinary 'programs' of study in university, further collaboration is desirable and possible. To achieve this, barriers must be weakened, if not removed, and structures for meaningful collaboration developed. This paper outlines the most distinctive differences between the research traditions, summarizes current varieties of

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cooperation and factors that support it, suggests areas of possible tension, and concludes with several recommendations to facilitate greater cooperation and collaboration.

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