

On Community Leadership: Stories About Collaboration in Action Research

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This article provides an account of a 10-year collaborative documentation of community leadership in an African American community on the South side of Chicago. The stories are oriented to several critical incidents in the life course of the collaboration. They are told from the perspectives of one university professor, four graduate students, and one community leader. Together they provide an account of how this research was shaped by the interactions of the research team with members of the community, how research questions emerged, methodologies were developed, ways of gathering data were tried and tested, and interpretations of data unfolded. Special attention is given to the ways in which the process and products of this research contributed to the community's own process of leadership development. The stories also discuss the various roles participants in this collaboration played both in the academic arena and in the community, and how they experienced gender, race, nationality, and social status.

KEY WORDS: collaboration; community leadership; research process; community research partnerships.

This is a report of the stories of five university participants and one representative of the community organization who took part in a 10-year documentation of community leadership in an African American community on the South side of Chicago.

The stories are oriented to several critical incidents in the life course of the collaboration. The sub-

stantive part of the work has been reported previously (Glidewell, Kelly, Bagby, & Dickerson, 1998; Kelly, 1999; Kelly, Mock, & Tandon, 2001; Tandon, Azelton, Kelly, & Strickland, 1998; Tandon, Kelly, & Mock, 2001). In brief, this work was a collaborative project between a small research group at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) and staff and community participants of the Developing Communities Project (DCP), a church-based community organization, to understand the qualities of community leaders. DCP, as a church-based organization, focuses on the social and economic development of a neighborhood on the south side of Chicago. Its mode of operation is community organizing of citizens to become community leaders (Obama, 1995). Citizens are recruited and trained by DCP through local churches to take part in a variety of events and projects to improve the quality of life in their community.

The collaboration reported here spanned the entire duration of the project—from entrée, planning, and data collection through data analysis to facilitating action steps. The collaboration involved creating panels and task forces to define the topics and select the

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variables to document the leadership qualities. The primary research method was an interview of 80 citizens trained by DCP to become community leaders. The methods of analysis were a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods that were congruent with the interests and values of the participants. The work also included active community participation in creating ways to enhance the use of the findings including the use of oral history methods.

This presentation will focus on the “behind the scenes” issues that are perceived, in retrospect, to be pivotal contexts for the work. The broad outlines of the various community and institutional contexts were reported in the above publications. In this presentation the process for carrying out the work will be expressed as stories, i.e., as first person statements to indicate the dynamics of carrying out the work. In this way we hope that the richness, the pain, and the pleasures of the research process, will be more clearly expressed. The stories are embedded in a research process that was conceived as an ecological framework (Kelly, Ryan, Altman, & Stelzner, 2000). This framework emphasizes designing research in the context of the natural resources of a community. Research is viewed as a process that helps focus on potential action steps derived from a collaborative understanding of the special needs of that community. The major ecological concepts in this presentation are: entry and socialization. This work follows in the tradition of action research dating from Kurt Lewin (Lewin, 1947). A recent comprehensive presentation of participatory action research is the edited handbook by Reason & Bradbury (2001).

THE STORIES

Jim Kelly: “A staff member, Barbara Cimaglio, of a State Agency (Department of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse) phoned in the fall of 1989 to inquire of my interest to evaluate a substance abuse proposal in an African American community. The then Director of the Agency (Alvera Stern and Barbara’s supervisor) had been employing the ecological framework in training prevention staff. Alvera Stern thought that I might I be an appropriate resource for this work. I thought that this might be an opportunity to do just what I really wanted to do: to be connected to citizen leadership development and to create a research site for doctoral students in community psychology. A meeting was held with Barbara Cimaglio and the Director John Owens and Associate Director Cassandra

Lowe, both community organizers with the Developing Communities Project (DCP), on December 21, 1989 at the state offices in Chicago.”⁹

Mamie Thomas (DCP Liaison with UIC): “DCP is very effective because it is a church-based coalition of about seven different denominations that come together under just causes and shared goals: community organization and development. UIC became another partner in the coalition. Organizing from a Christian perspective is different than from a secular perspective. We are called to do community organizing from a greater power other than just one person or organization simply because we are called to be servants of God and to do his will; this is our identity! We must have an instrument or process in place to aid our community. We must have community organizing to unite individuals in times of despair and hopelessness. We have to improve the lot of others, whether they are homeless, mentally ill, drug addicted, or whatever their lot in life. We perish without hope and vision. As Martin Luther King, Jr., said: “We want justice to roll like a mighty river and righteousness like a never failing stream” (Amos, Chapter 5, Verse 24).”

Jim Kelly: “DCP was seeking funds to test out a community organizing approach to the prevention of substance abuse. It was also clear that if it worked out I would receive a budget of \$50, 000 a year to do the work, not a substantial amount of resources to tackle an ambitious undertaking. DCP would receive \$150, 000 a year for the community organizing activities.

As I recall, the meeting was cordial. Barbara was clearly an advocate for me to do the work. This was an occasion where my theoretical orientation was quite salient. The ecological premise in designing prevention programs is to understand the natural resources of the community, the community leaders of DCP (Kelly, Dassoff, Levin, Schreckengost, Stelzher, & Altman, 1988). The training of local community residents could provide the social momentum to make prevention efforts both systemic and long standing.

I made two points at the meeting: First, it is a mistake to devote time and energy to evaluate community

⁹The first State Staff person, Barbara Cimaglio, is now employed in a Western state and the two DCP staff members are no longer with the organization. During the 10-year period there were three Directors of DCP: John Owens, Cassandra Lowe, and Debra Strickland. There have been two Liaison persons: Margaret Bagby and Mamie Thomas and three Representatives from the State of Illinois: Barbara Cimaglio, Karen Furlong, and Kimberly Fornaro. This is a reality in reporting on the process of a longitudinal project. As people change locations it reduces the reporting of potential discordant or consensual “memories” of important events.

organizing efforts by imposing various experimental designs and thereby think that one could assess and/or control the multiple factors that impact a diminution of the use of substances at the community level. An alternative evaluation approach could concentrate on documenting community members who were being trained and developed as community leaders by the organization. The premise would be that a community that has competent and well-organized participants could in turn mobilize substantial community efforts and resources to reduce social problems in their own community. Second, if I was to be involved I would hope that the work could be collaborative, in that all decisions about evaluation methods and procedures would be a process of joint decision making between the DCP participants and UIC. The DCP staff seemed surprised and positive about my approach. In retrospect these two points helped provide a structure for us to create our own socialization process e.g., how we were going to do business together.”

The Beginning of the Beginning

The next 6 months, the spring of 1990, was devoted to establishing contact with the Executive Director of DCP, John Owens. That was no small or easy task; the entry process was tedious. Meetings were scheduled. John did not appear. As I recall, I made at least four trips from the UIC campus to DCP, approximately a distance of 15 miles, when he was a “no show.” John and I then began a series of phone conversations in which we exchanged views about the work. I learned more about the difficulties of creating a coalition of pastors to create a church-based community organization. I began to understand his role and the constraints on his role: to create an organization while also organizing the community. In retrospect, this was an important part of the entry process for these phone conversations provided us with an opportunity to see if we could really talk to each other. I never asked John directly but I believe that during the period of the phone calls he checked me out around Chicago and found out that I was supportive of community organizing and was experienced and comfortable working in an African American community. I also think that he began to believe that I was sincere in my desire to do work that was of direct benefit to DCP.

Then a pivotal event occurred. John Owens volunteered to come to my office at the University. On my office door was a picture of Max Roach, jazz drummer. Underneath the picture was the following quote: “Just

take everything in and after you do that, then shut everything out and go for yourself. And that’s good advice, not only for drummers but for anybody who is trying to develop some kind of personality that’s identifiable only to them. Be strong and brave enough to stand up and say ‘its me.’”

John seemed shocked and/or amazed. Then he smiled and said ‘Kelly, you can’t be all bad.’ He was an avid jazz fan! Our conversation that afternoon was animated. Before we discussed our work together we must have spent 20 min discussing our favorite jazz musicians and CDs. He had a dinner meeting in downtown Chicago so in departing the University I accompanied him and left him at his restaurant. This was the “ice breaker” event in the entry process.

I was thinking that progress was being made, e.g., that in fact there was a basis for trust to emerge between the Anglo white senior academic and the younger African American community organizer. Our next meetings were focused on the tasks of creating the collaboration. He was prompt and ready to talk. He invited me to present my ideas about the proposed work at a DCP Board meeting in May. The Board meeting was cordial and low key; there were few questions from the DCP Board as I recall.

One of my proposals for collaboration was to have a member of the DCP Board serve as Liaison between DCP and the University. The Liaison person could be very helpful in advising on the style and substance of the work and facilitating data collection and interpreting the needs of the DCP community to the University group and vice versa. The concept was that the Liaison person not only could help the entry process but also more importantly help create a framework for the socialization process for the collaborative work; to help participants feel comfortable and validated for contributing to the project.

I wanted someone who would speak their mind, have the confidence of the other DCP Board members. He recommended Margaret Bagby who had been with the organization since its beginning 5 years before. I met her in June and believed that she was very able to function in that role. She was assertive, unpretentious, and committed to DCP. She served in the Liaison role for the next 7 years until 1997. Since 1997 coauthor Mamie Thomas has performed most admirably in the Liaison role.”

Mamie Thomas: “About my role as Liaison between DCP and UIC you got to be committed to it! The money is not enough (\$400.00 per month). I have to know and understand the purpose of DCP and the constituents of the community which it serves. This

enables me to be a good Liaison. You have to be interested in people. I call my committee members all the time; with God's help I know their strengths and weaknesses when subcommittees need to be formed. Be honest and straight up. People will respect you even if they don't like you. Be willing to fail as well as succeed. Just get up and keep going. The Liaison person has to realize the needs of growth within DCP. We now have this documentation process in place to evaluate our strengths and weaknesses. Prior to the work with UIC we had nothing in place."

Jim Kelly: "The next topic was to create a group of DCP members who could meet with the UIC group to decide on what topics should be documented and what methods should be used. I felt that the project was beginning to gel. There was now a format for communication between the Director and myself and there were concrete plans in place on how the collaboration would be carried out. The formation of the community group could be an important structure to establish the socialization process for communication between the two groups. I was also more convinced that the ecological perspective and the community organizing perspective were in fact very compatible. They both focus on creating and preserving the natural resources of communities."

The Work Begins

"Early in August John had composed a panel of eight people. They included a parent, a Catholic elementary school principal, a welfare rights advocate, a public school principal, who had an Ed. D degree, a community organization executive, a labor organizer, a citizen active in school reform, and a pastor.¹⁰ I was delighted and began to contact them individually to inform them about the proposed work.

At this same time two persons were entering graduate work at UIC and agreed to work on this project. Cecile Lardon was in organizational psychology and Lynne Mock in clinical psychology. The three of us began to meet to plan the collection of background information that would be needed for the community group. We referred to the community group as the 'Community Research Panel.' The concept for the UIC team was to review the literature on

leadership and related concepts and present them for review and discussion with the Panel. In addition to reviewing the psychology literature we learned much about community church-based organizing and community leadership in that context. We discovered that the literature on leadership derived solely from the psychology literature was not that salient or helpful to this context, particularly citizen leaders coming from African American churches. Looking back this literature activity coupled with the meetings of the Community Research Panel provided the initial socialization for how the UIC team would work together and how the UIC group would work with the Community Research Panel and vice versa."

Cecile Lardon: "Lynne and I spent a lot of time at the library and even more time reading research articles. Although both of us had done literature reviews before, this was at a different level and at a different speed than what we had been used to. Not only did we have to learn about concepts of measurement and figure out how to evaluate research, but we also had to translate what we had barely absorbed ourselves into everyday language so that we could discuss the findings at our next Research Panel meeting. It was a crash course on research methods, but also an opportunity to bring that research to life in the community discussions that followed. The general topic of my Master's thesis grew out of the critique of the literature and those discussions with members of the DCP community. By the time I was able to put my interest in community empowerment into words, I had some understanding of its meaning in the particular social context of that community."

Lynne Mock: "During our first semester, I remember having to adjust to large volumes of readings for class and for the project. It became clear to me that the graduate program, albeit a clinical-community program, clinical training was primary, community secondary. Sometimes the values and norms of the two programs were at odds. In the clinical program, we were being socialized to be experts in a hierarchical relationship with our clients. In the community program, we were being socialized to develop collaborative relationships with community organizers with our expertise in an academic realm and their expertise in their community context."

Jim Kelly: "I met with Margaret Bagby, the Liaison person and had individual meetings with each of the prospective panel members. All were very busy but agreed to serve. My view was that the Panel meetings would focus on topics to be studied and methods to be used. I was also interested in having these

¹⁰The members of the Community Research Panel from 1990–1992 were: Hameedoh Akbar, Linda Bond, Anna Dickerson, Dr. Alma Jones, Doris Jones, Eugene Rogers, Rev. Booker Vance, and Verna Worsham.

meetings documented. I located a person experienced in verbatim recording of groups to attend the meetings and record them, Sandra Scheinfeld. This was agreeable to the Director and Liaison person as well as the individual panel members. She also interviewed the UIC group and Panel members after their first panel meeting and then again after the 11th meeting.”

Lynne Mock: “When Sandra interviewed me in the fall of 1990, I expressed concerns about how I would be perceived on the project. I started out with a lot of questions and concerns. Being the only African American on the project, would I be perceived as a token on the project? Will I be perceived as a ‘collaborator’ in the negative sense—a Black person working for the university and exploiting the Black community? Was the evaluation requested by the community organization or required of them? Overtime, I learned that I would be valued for my growing expertise in our work and for my experiences as an African American woman. The main difference between myself and the members of the panel was my formal training in psychology. Although the evaluation was required, the organization did have a choice in who would be conducting the evaluation and how it would be done. Everyone was very positive about our collaborative approach to documenting the work of the organization.”

The Community Research Panel Meetings

Jim Kelly: “The first panel meeting was scheduled at DCP on January 17, 1991. Five members of the Panel were present along with Margaret, John, and Cassandra of DCP, the three of us from UIC, plus Sandra. This was coincidentally the first night of the Gulf War bombing. Several panel members had relatives fighting in the War.”

Lynne Mock: “During our first panel meeting, I presented three concepts that I thought would be important for understanding community leadership: self-concept, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. These concepts were rejected. I felt rejected, but soon realized that the process was working very well from the very beginning. Overtime, Jim was so impressed with the level of discussion that he suggested that we invite a panel member to sit on our Master’s thesis committees. Due to my own anxieties, I decided not to do it. However, I invited the pastor to serve on my dissertation committee, and he accepted. His contributions were valuable.”

Jim Kelly: “There were a total of 18 Panel meetings until November 19, 1992. On average there were

four panel members present at the meetings scheduled 3–4 weeks apart at DCP offices in the evenings. Each panel member received a 20–25-page transcript of the previous meeting prepared by Sandra before the next meeting. These transcripts turned out to be invaluable for several reasons. One, if a person missed a meeting they could quickly get up to date. Secondly, the transcripts revealed that the UIC group was listening and processing the comments of the panel on what topics were important to them and which ones were not useful. A detailed analysis of the meeting transcripts has been published with the Liaison person, Margaret Bagby and one of the panel members, Anna Dickerson as coauthors (Glidewell et al., 1998).

After the first meeting the panel members were unclear of the purpose of the group (Scheinfeld, 1992b). When the panelists were interviewed again after the 11th panel meeting they were positive to enthusiastic: One of the panelists said: “Everyone has something to say on each topic, even if it’s only agreeing. They don’t sit back and not say anything, and they feel free to speak up on issues. People feel free to say things because Jim doesn’t seem like he’s the leader. It seems like he is more learning and that is a great thing for him to do (Scheinfeld, 1992b), p. 39.”

The panel members proposed five topics for documentation: (1) the nature of the leader’s primary community involvement; (2) what the community leader is learning as a result of being active with DCP; (3) the leader’s personal effectiveness; (4) the leader’s working relationships with other organizations and community groups; (5) the leader’s personal visions for the community. They also proposed that an interview was preferred over a questionnaire or survey. The panel had accomplished a great deal. It was a confirming experience that a community group and a university group could reach goals that would reflect the community’s values. I was pleased, proud, and energized.

There were two occasions during the panel meetings that were most memorable. At the second panel meeting the school principal with a doctorate in education, Alma Jones, was familiar with a research style that was explicit and direct and where hypotheses were clearly stated. She was confused by the ambiguity and uncertainty of the process she was now engaged in. She challenged me as to the purpose of the panel. I prepared a 10-page statement, which was read by her and then circulated, to the entire group. This seemed to make a difference; there was more clarity about goals and process. No doubt the Liaison person, Margaret Bagby, played a major role behind the

scenes to clarify and support the work. This query from Dr. Jones, as the most formally educated member of the Community Research Panel, was an important pivotal event in the entry process as well as the socialization process for the work of the panel. It provided an explicit opportunity to state and restate the ground rules and visions for the panel.

A second occasion was the third meeting. One of the panel members, Verna Worsham, said that she was the Chair of the Local School Council but that she did not lead the meetings. She had some other person do that. This comment stimulated a discussion of the varieties of contributions that people can make to community change; the focal person was not the only leader. This in turn led another panel member, Linda Bond, to talk about 'leadership as making soup; there are many ingredients needed to make a great soup.' This metaphor anchored the discussions for the remainder of the meetings. It provides wonderful contrasts with the traditional notion of community leadership as reflecting the specific qualities of one or two individuals.

The metaphor thus created a foundation for future discussions and gave the UIC group a solid basis to design an interview consonant with these concepts. This metaphor also anchored the socialization process for the work of the panel. The metaphor of leadership as making soup gave the panel a working structure of shared values. The UIC group and DCP participants were in fact working to create something worthwhile that could be potentially useful to DCP.

In June 1991, after completing 19 panel meetings, the UIC group, including Sandra Scheinfeld, the documenter of the meetings and John Owens, gave the first presentation of the work at the Third Biennial Conference of SCRA. Cecile and Lynne talked about the stresses of doing collaborative research as graduate students, e.g., the time it takes to work out community relationships is often in conflict with requirements of graduate school to produce publishable work quickly. The audience reception was very positive. We were charged up."

Cecile Lardon: "The first presentation at the biennial was exciting, but also a bit intimidating. While I was painfully aware of the pressure and challenges associated with this research project, I had not had much opportunity to make sense of the conflicting demands on me. The research project and graduate school had been moving so fast; there was little time to reflect on what and how we were learning to fit together. Having to put words to these experiences and

to make them public was not easy, but it turned out to be helpful and supportive."

Mamie Thomas: "The collaborative process was good for DCP in terms of self-evaluation and as an instrument for growth, in level of training, and for recruiting new leadership. Out of this process, the training component of DCP (The Urban Training Institute) was born. The process that we went through with UIC was an objective way to measure our strengths and weaknesses and to emulate effective organizational skills. We also clarified our expectations from the community. UIC helped to clarify our weaknesses and celebrate our strengths. UIC became a good resource in matters of personnel and funding. They were willing to share their knowledge."

The Design of the Interview

Jim Kelly: "In the fall of 1991 a new graduate student in organizational psychology, joined the group, L. Sean Azelton. We four began in earnest to design the interview. We divided up the topics and began to generate Interview questions in keeping with Panel discussions. These topics included the five topics recommended by the panel as previously stated. We met in lengthy item writing sessions and created many versions of the Interview using UIC undergraduate students from the DCP community to give feedback on how well the items could be communicated to the community. There were frequent discussions with Margaret Bagby, John Owens, and Cassandra Lowe about the directions we were taking. There were individual meetings with various panel members. We also received feedback from the Survey Research staff at UIC."

Cecile Lardon: "After we had been working on the content of the interview questions for some time, we began to pay more attention to the structure and format of the interview. As with the literature reviews during the first year, we had a lot to learn. The meetings with the Survey Research Lab staff taught us much about survey development, but the suggestions we received often seemed too "technical" in comparison to the fluid and dynamic topics we were interested in exploring. These were open exchanges that helped us come to terms with our own ambiguity about our approach. We also discussed how we could balance scientific rigor with staying true to the discourse that was specific to the host community."

Sean Azelton: "I think going into the meetings with the Survey Research Lab we were hopeful that

the exchanges would solidify our thinking about the topics we were exploring. At the same time we were fearful that the Survey Research staff would not value the collaborative approach we were engaged in. Our fears were alleviated as the Survey Research staff gave valuable input. The technical exchanges on the interview design gave us a point-counterpoint balance with the input from the panel meetings. We grew to value the assistance, which allowed us to elaborate the flesh and bones from the panel meetings onto the skeleton the Survey Group provided.”

Jim Kelly: “In the spring of 1992 an opportunity was created for the panel members to comment on their experiences up to this point at the Midwestern Psychological Association meetings. John Owens took part as did Margaret Bagby and six of the eight panel members. Barbara Cimaglio, the DASA staff member and a discussant, Professor Thom Moore from the University Of Illinois at Urbana, were also present. The day before the meeting Rodney King was beaten by LA Police Officers.

The discussion at this conference was an example of creating a setting that was validating for all of us and helped to celebrate the entry process. In response, John Owens said, ‘I don’t even want to be bothered or waste my time talking with people who don’t appreciate the value of community organizations. I have a strong sense that these people do.’ (Scheinfeld, 1992a). Barbara said that this work was ‘one of the more exciting efforts that I have seen.’ (Scheinfeld, 1992a).

Three months later in August of 1992 the UIC group (Cecile, Lynne, Sean, Sandra, and myself) with John and Margaret and one of the Panel members, Anna Dickerson, presented at the APA meetings. Thom Moore was again the discussant. Cecile, Lynne, and Sean identified how they were going to analyze the interview data to assess their concepts of participatory competence, personal visions, and organizational communication.

On this occasion Margaret revealed to the audience (quite accurately) how she had to tell me to not phone the panel members right after a panel meeting to inform them of the next meeting. ‘They are not going to remember a date a month away. I usually have to remind them a few days before the meeting’ (Bagby, 1993). This was a major occasion in that we could express our views with representatives of the community present. There was much anxiety by all participants before the event but it was a confirming occasion for the work. Thom Moore said: ‘The value base that has emerged from this work is that research

is a process where mutual trust and respect is the cornerstone of the relationship’ (Moore 1992).”

Lynne: “Preparing for meetings with our funder, DASA, and, coauthoring presentations and articles cemented our working relationships. In psychology, often African Americans are presented as clients in need of help. In our work, we depended on African American adults to identify and address serious community-level problems and to articulate how they do this. I felt fortunate to be a part of a project that explored the assets rather than the deficits of African Americans.”

Jim Kelly: “While these two positive events occurred the UIC group was in the midst of making compromises and coping with our frustrations to create and then revise the interview. There were also compromises as we tried to enable Lynne, Cecile, and Sean to obtain Master’s theses from the various sections of the Interview. We finally created an interview that we believed met academic standards and the needs of the panel. But when a panel member participated in a practice interview it took 4 hours! With more help from the Survey Research Lab Staff and UIC undergraduate students living in the DCP community we were able to reduce the Interview to 90 min. This near final version was tried out with John and Cassandra and four DCP Board members. With their positive evaluations we were ready to train interviewers, almost 3 years into the project. It was now the spring of 1993.”

Cecile Lardon: “The interview had grown out of a research process that involved the community and the university research team. Every question had a history in the Community Research Panel Meetings and in numerous discussions that followed those meetings. We all felt connected to it, and, as graduate students, we had developed our research and professional skills in the process. I had a very strong sense of ownership and felt good about the process and the product. At the same time, I had been experiencing quite a bit of pressure by the psychology department to get my thesis done. The uncertainties associated with the interview convinced Lynne and I that we needed a thesis project that allowed us a bit more control, even if that meant a compromise in the research methodology we selected. Our compromise was that we would develop questionnaires that: (a) were based on the definitions developed during the Community Research Panel meetings; (b) would further involve community members; and (c) could be used by the host community as training tools for leadership development. We quickly worked with DCP staff and

Board members to develop the measures and then collected data in several African American churches. We finally defended our theses in April of 1994, almost 4 years after we began graduate school.”

The Interview Process

Jim Kelly: “The Woods Fund in Chicago provided supplementary funds to train community members as interviewers. Rather than import professional Interviewers the concept was to recruit and train community residents as interviewers. DCP Board members and staff nominated 10 candidates from the community. They received training at DCP by a staff member of the UIC Survey Research Lab. Following more intense follow-up practice sessions with the interview protocol eight interviewers were no longer available to conduct interviews for a variety of reasons including insufficient reading skills, child care needs, and issues related to the structure and schedule of the task. One of the original persons trained and three UIC-nominated persons from the community began interviewing in August of 1993 after having participated in further training (Azelton, 1995a, 1995b).

Following completion of the meetings of the Community Research Panel in June 1992 I arranged at least monthly meetings with the DCP staff and Liaisons. These were usually luncheon meetings to maintain communication and propose next steps or to discuss problems. There were also yearly meetings with the DCP Board and yearly meetings with the State staff.

By August 1993, the former Associate Director of DCP, Cassandra Lowe, became Director of DCP. She nominated 80 persons to be interviewed who had been or were being trained as DCP community leaders. Extensive efforts by DCP staff informed DCP leaders of the interview. Margaret worked hard to contact the potential interviewees and explain the purposes of the interview. This followed letters by the DCP staff, myself as well as additional personal contacts with each leader. One interviewer became discouraged with the difficulties of contacting people to interview at night and resigned. After 8 months, 18 interviews were completed. Through the recommendation of one of the original interviewers and the UIC Survey Research Lab staff an experienced interviewer and a resident of a neighboring community was located. With the help of this interviewer 80 interviews were completed by March of next year.”

Sean Azelton: “This was certainly a frustrating period in that it was not anticipated that the interview

process would take almost 2 years. This illustrates that as the research process moves from one phase to another there is a new entry process; in this case the entry of completing the interviews. The dedication of the new interviewer to complete the interviews gave me hope that we would eventually see the fruits of our labor. Interview responses from 60 persons interviewed indicated that the majority of respondents felt that the interviewers had been interested in their opinions and had been professional at all times (Azelton, 1995a, 1995b)”

The Analysis of Interviews

Jim Kelly: “In the fall of 1994 UIC began official doctoral training in community psychology. Darius Tandon, one of three persons to enter the new program, was interested to work on this project. Sean, Darius, and I began to discuss the analysis of the interviews. The detail about the analyses is presented in Tandon et al., 1998. We decided to analyze the interviews in as direct and as meaningful way as possible. We went through the interviews identifying major themes. We wanted to communicate the information in a usable form that would be congruent with DCP philosophy. We thought that a tree metaphor would be apt. DCP is concerned with developing leaders; DCP thinks of development as an organic evolving process. I remembered a watercolor that my youngest daughter, Kathryn, made for me to a Herman Hesse poem: ‘Trees are the most penetrating preachers; the world rustles in their highest boughs, their roots rest in infinity; but they do not lose themselves there. . . they struggle with all the force of their lives for one thing only to build their own form, to fulfill their own laws, to represent themselves.’

The tree metaphor seemed right. The tree metaphor also symbolically expressed the reciprocal research relationship. The data was about to be analyzed in a form that would be congruent with DCP values. The three of us began to organize the data into major concepts. The first version included 50 concepts that represented consensual decisions. After an elaborate coding process in the summer of 1995, including reliability ratings with three raters, the results were assembled for DCP. Five trees were prepared for each of the 80 persons interviewed and presented to DCP. The five Trees were: Community Involvement; Facilitating Factors for Community Involvement; DCP Influence on Community Leaders; Religious Beliefs Impacting Community Work; and Personal Visions of DCP Leaders. For each tree there were branches that

further differentiated the responses. This work was well received by DCP. Darius, Sean, the third DCP Director, Debra Strickland, and I presented the work at the SPSSI meetings in May of 1996. During this time Lynne, Cecile, and Sean completed Master's theses on their DCP work along with completing their Preliminary Examinations. (Azelton, 1995a, 1995b; Lardon, 1995; Mock 1994)."

Darius Tandon: "Using the "tree" metaphor to present findings on the five dimensions of community leadership for the 80 DCP leaders points to a central approach in communicating our findings. As I think about the yearly meetings with DCP & DASA staff it was evident that the DCP leadership understood and appreciated the straightforward display of information in the tree format. DCP leadership said that the data encouraged them to think more about how to focus leadership development for the various subgroups within the DCP church community. As a graduate student learning from this community-based experience, it stressed for me the importance of anchoring the presentation of data to the specific context of the community."

Sean Azelton: "The dedication and vigilance required to successfully complete our Master's theses brought home that collaboration is constantly evolving (Azelton, 1995b). As we worked on the tree metaphor, I was clearly reminded of what I had intuitively and intellectually known: that the collaborative research process is a relationship, which continually changes over time. The research process becomes richer as the relationships become richer, more detailed, and evolving. The tree metaphor is appropriate not only to describe the data but the research process itself—filled with new branches, which in turn provide new avenues of inquiry, all rooted in common values and viewpoints."

Jim Kelly: "In a parallel activity Darius carried out analyses in which he reviewed and assembled actual quotes from the interviews and organized these quotes by four topics: (1) How DCP functions as a resource to developing leaders; (2) How DCP acts as a resource for the Greater Roseland Area; (3) What ingredients are needed to perform community work; (4) What are some barriers to performing community work. He presented the 51-page Quote book at the SCRA biennial meetings (Tandon, 1995). Margaret Bagby and panel members and participants in the presentation were enthusiastic about the document at follow-up meetings. This is another example of the UIC group creating data and reports that are directly consonant with DCP goals, fur-

ther exemplifying the reciprocal ties between all the participants.

A presentation was made of the progress completed as well as the proposed tree analyses at a reunion dinner of the Community Research Panel in November 1996. Seven of the eight panel members were present 4 years after the work of the panel had been completed. It was a lovely and joyful reunion!

This 6-year period marked the completion of work that was unique and hopefully useful to the DCP community. There were changes in DCP; three persons had served as Directors. One of the panel members, also a coauthor, Anna Dickerson had died of a heart attack. These changes and losses required some shifts in emphasis and modest changes in ways of working. It became apparent however, that there was a need to create ways to have the data become more useful to DCP. The data was cited by DCP in reports to foundations and granting agencies but DCP members at the individual church level were not extensively discussing the meaning of the findings."

The DCP Action Task Force

Debra Strickland DCP Director agreed that there was merit in having a group of DCP members review the total work and consider areas of application. She nominated and recruited 10 persons from the DCP churches.¹¹ Ten new persons from the DCP community met for the first time with UIC staff, Debra, and the new Liaison Person, Mamie Thomas in the spring of 1997.

Mamie Thomas: "Some DCP members did not understand the documentation process and thought that the collaboration was a waste of time. We in DCP who were involved with UIC became more involved than we intended. We added more meetings, did presentations, coauthored articles. These additional activities on balance gave us more insights about the process of evaluation."

Jim Kelly: "There was interest to focus on what concrete steps could be taken for DCP to maximally use this research data. The group named themselves "The DCP Action Task Force" with Mamie Thomas, Secretary of the DCP Board, and now Liaison with

¹¹The members of the DCP Action Task Force (1997–present) are: Rev. William Fristoe, Bobbie Henry, Sandra Sanders-Herrin, Rev. Frank N Milton, Deacon T.R. Neuman, Alberta Roberts, Mamie Thomas, George Turk, Richard Watson, and Deacon James Woodson.

UIC, elected as Chairperson. At an all day meeting in November 1997 several concrete proposals were made to increase the visibility of the findings within the DCP community. Examples were for every church to create a DCP Newsletter and a brochure for recruiting. Follow-up discussions with subgroups of the Action Task Force reemphasized how the data could contribute to training needs. In the spring of 1998 at meetings of subgroups of the Action Task Force DCP participants gave anecdotes about events that should be captured and included in training materials. It was at this point that I mentioned the possible benefit of oral histories as a resource, particularly if they were videotaped. There was enthusiasm for this idea. The Action Force Task Members believed that the videos could be used for fund raising as well as training. Some believed that they could also provide a history of DCP.”

Mamie Thomas: “DCP through the DCP-UIC Action Task Force helped to bond DCP and the UIC staff and students to a strong collaboration. UIC attended community meetings to see DCP in action. Our meetings with UIC were rewarding because not only were the UIC staff pleasant and helpful, offering rides, providing dinners and lunches, but they listened. This is the first academic group that didn’t feel that they knew everything.”

Darius Tandon: “The DCP Action Task Force was instrumental in insuring that the findings could be evaluated by DCP. There were several challenges that the Action Task Force faced. First, there was the lack of continuity from one meeting to the next, given the usual 4 weeks between meetings. Thus, substantial time at meetings was spent making sure everyone was up to date. Secondly, some members were inactive while other members diligently reviewed materials provided to them. Third, there was a tendency for female laypersons to defer to the male pastors and deacons. These were some of the issues as the Action Task Force went about its important and useful work.”

Lynne Mock: “It is great to see the Action Task Force come together and work productively. They are proof that our first experience in forming the Community Research Panel was not just good luck, but that our procedures produce reliable, positive results.”

Planning the Oral Histories

Jim Kelly: “Debra Strickland, at my suggestion, selected six persons who would be considered exemplars of DCP, who were respected by other DCP

members, and were known in the larger community. I also suggested that they represent different subgroups within DCP and that they be divided between pastors and laity and men and women. Debra selected three women, two male pastors and a male Deacon. In the fall of 1998 I met individually with the six persons: the two pastors (Reverend Alvin Love, President of the DCP Board and Rev. William Fristoe), Deacon, T. R. Neuman, and the three women leaders who had been active in DCP for at least 5 years, Cora Long, Irma Reed, and Mamie Thomas. I worked out a general list of topics for the oral histories. They all agreed to participate.

Fortunately I received a Great Cities Scholar Award from UIC for the spring of 1999, which released me from teaching obligations so that I could work full time on the Oral Histories. Individual audiotape interviews of 90 min length were conducted with each leader. Each leader then received copies of the written transcripts. I met with each community leader again, several times with some leaders, to edit the transcripts. Each of the persons also provided me with their favorite Bible saying and their favorite hymn that could be included on the videotape.

Each DCP leader nominated two persons to interview them on camera. This choice was made to insure that the oral history process was clearly a DCP owned activity. In addition to the 25-page edited type-scripts, I prepared a 5-page summary of each type-script. These two documents were made available to the interviewers at six individual dinner meetings with the two interviewers and their featured person. The interviewers were encouraged to use the written materials as a guide for the interview.

At about this time, May of 1999, I decided to retire from UIC at the end of August and move to Davis, California. This added some incentive to complete the videotaping during the summer. Editing was completed in California.

This work was presented at the meetings of the Oral History Association in Durham, North Carolina in October of 2000 to a very positive audience. Two of the leaders (Mamie Thomas and Deacon T. R. Neuman) were present along with Debra Strickland who commented on the multiple uses of the videotapes, including orienting new staff and fundraising. The DCP Action Task Force is now going through the final process of composing an edited videotape with selections from each of the six individual videos. I am very excited about the preparation of the oral histories. It was a meaningful closing for me. I was very pleased with both the process and the product.”

CONCLUSION

The above comments represent reflections on the process of beginning and doing inquiry that has been collaborative both in concept and in deeds. Whatever successes derived from this work can be attributed to the spirit, competence, and commitment of doctoral students and the cooperation and trust of the staff and community leaders of DCP. We all were able to prevail. This type of research is demanding yet fulfilling. What is clear, after the decade of this expedition, is that being attentive to the process of the work is a source of support in carrying out the work. There were several structural supports that aided the collaboration. These were recruiting Liaison Persons and the creation of the two panels: the Community Research Panel and the Action Task Force. These persons and groups gave concrete and symbolic meaning to the collaboration. Creating times to present the work at professional meetings that included the community participants gave more opportunity for shared dialogue and mutual appreciation of each other's role. Annual meetings with the State staff brought UIC and DCP together to report on accomplishments and inform State staff about the nature of collaborative work between the university group and community organizations. Being attentive to the process of the work enhances the quality of the working relationships, which in turn increases opportunities for community persons and university staff to speak from their hearts.

In a collaborative atmosphere obstacles can be addressed where there is a shared history. It is also important to note that the various processes related to this work created shared metaphors that helped to congeal the university and community partners and to establish a common language for the work. The metaphor of leadership as making soup is one example. The concept of a tree to analyze and present the interview data is another example. The style of the research process was to arrange it so that meetings could be involving. Sharing bread is a powerful symbolic statement about cooperation and shared experiences. Our important discussions were at breakfasts, lunches, and dinners.

One lesson learned is that collaborative inquiry depends first upon a supportive granting agency. With this support committed researchers and committed community participants can concentrate on the work and their collaboration. The working relationship is intrinsically essential so as to create knowledge that is really community based. The fact that the State of

Illinois invested \$50,000 a year for the documentation of this project gave the community–university collaboration a predictable structure which made it clear that the work was valued. The State staff never questioned the focus, direction, or time of the entire process.

If this work would be done over again more attention would be given to creating a more supportive environment for community research at the university. For example, deadlines designed to move graduate students through the program as quickly as possible may need to be relaxed to provide the time required to build the necessary community relationships on which research can be developed. Also, the criteria for various program requirements such as theses and preliminary/comprehensive examinations could be designed to better-fit meaningful research in a community setting. Less focus on a specific curriculum of required courses and more opportunities for theoretical training based on a community research project could lessen the often-felt tensions between community and classroom demands. Establishing an advisory board of researchers and community leaders could facilitate problem solving.

The ecological orientation that guided the work made it possible to embed the work in the community and to create research questions and methods and to do so with community participants. The answers to these questions came from methods created with community participants that were directly tied to community interests. The ecological orientation also increased the self-consciousness of the UIC research team to the processes involved in research and not just to technologies or methods. The methods were responsive to the processes of the work and the values and aspirations of the community members. This ecological expedition, while not complete or final, established a basis for understanding and supporting local leadership, thereby contributing in a small way to renewed democratic processes in this one neighborhood. In this work goodwill was created. That goodwill helped the inquiry to be sustained. The goodwill helped all the participants prevail so that there is now some further understanding of community leadership in this African American community on the South side of Chicago.

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