Developing effective evaluation partnerships: Paradigmatic and contextual barriers

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Pardon him, Theodotus: he is barbarian and thinks that the customs of his tribe and island are the laws of nature.

George B. Shaw, *Caesar and Cleopatra.*

Collaborative partnerships have become a custom fundamental to the practice of community psychology (e.g., Kelly, 1988). The involvement of stakeholders in all aspects of the research and evaluation process is expected to increase opportunities for empowerment, (e.g., Bartunek, Foster-Fishman, & Keys, in press) enhance local ownership (e.g., Butterfoss, Goodman, & Wandersman, 1993; Keith, Knox, Perkins, & Blakman, 1995), and improve program effectiveness (e.g., Kelly, 1988). In fact, research

and evaluation procedures that exclude community involvement are often criticized as patriarchal and misguided (e.g., Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

As community psychologists, we have chanted the collaboration mantra ourselves, attempting to actively include stakeholders in all of our initiatives. While we have succeeded in our collaboration many times, we have also, more recently, experienced some failures. These failures have resulted in a loss of funding, have damaged community relations, and have increased the participants' skepticism about future collaborations. In other words, some of our attempts to foster a collaborative, empowering evaluation process have resulted, instead, in disempowering outcomes.

These recent failures triggered some significant retrospection on our part and caused us to

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ask the following questions: Is a collaborative approach to evaluation always appropriate? Under what conditions should it be avoided? The importance of examining such questions became more evident to us we reviewed the recent developments in evaluation science (e.g., Fetterman, 1996; Guba & Lincoln, 1989) and realized that a collaborative model to evaluation may begin to be viewed as the panacea for addressing the limitations of the more traditional evaluation methodologies. Given the increased popularity of professional/community collaborations across a wide spectrum of disciplines, it is essential that we understand when partnerships should be pursued and when they should be abandoned.

How do we know if the conditions needed for collaboration to succeed are present? The purpose of the present paper is to describe two forces that impact the capacity for an effective professional/community partnership: 1) the stakeholder's epistemology or biases about appropriate modes of inquiry; and 2) the context in which the collaboration occurs. These two elements make up the ethos of an evaluation collaboration and in a large part determine its potential for success. We provide one case example to illustrate the significant role these two factors play in the partnership process. We end with a list of guiding strategies or «rules of thumb» that community psychologists could employ to determine when and how collaborative partnerships should be initiated.

Evaluation Partnerships. The need for more effective program evaluations has never been more critical. Decades of social programming and evaluation efforts have failed to produce the social change that was promised (Shadish, Cook, & Leviton, 1991). Meanwhile, funder demands for accountability are increasing and the amount of funds available for social services are declining. Critical stakeholders (e.g., funders, program planners, community members) are increasingly expecting evaluations to not only determine program effectiveness but also to improve program functioning (Reisman, Mockler, Collins, & Clegg, 1995).

What determines if an evaluation can have such impact? Recent developments in evaluation science as well as reviews of the impact of prior evaluation findings suggests that it has less to do with a rigorous evaluation design and more to do

with effective collaborations between evaluators and key stakeholders (Altman, 1995; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In fact, recent evaluation models such as empowerment evaluation (Fetterman, 1996), developmental evaluation (Patton, 1994), and fourth generation evaluation (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) – all depend upon a strong collaborative partnership among community members, program implementers, and the evaluator. In addition to assessing program efficacy, these popular evaluation models also aim to increase participant self-determination (Fetterman, 1996; Guba & Lincoln, 1989), enhance program effectiveness (Patton, 1996), and build local capacity for program sustainability (Altman, 1995). The collaborative partnership provides the vehicle for accomplishing these additional goals.

Collaboration occurs when multiple stakeholders (e.g., funders, program planners participants evaluators) invested in a common problem engage in joint decision-making and action to resolve the targeted issue (Wood & Gray, 1991). By involving stakeholders in problem definition the design and execution of evaluation protocols or interventions, data interpretation and dissemination, evaluations can have a continuous impact on programming (Patton, 1994). Feedback is more timely and meaningful when program implementers, in particular, are actively involved in constructing the evaluation process. Learning from evaluation data increases significantly when project officers are actively involved throughout all phases of the evaluation process (Forss, Crackness, & Samset, 1994). Program sustainability increases when community ownership for the targeted project is enhanced (Altman, 1995). Funder investment in the programming efforts can increase when funding officers are involved in shaping the program and implementation process. Overall, this collaborative strategy requires a tight coupling between the evaluation and programming process.

Such collaboration also increase key stakeholder investment in the evaluation process. When community members and funders are involved in identifying evaluation questions, selecting outcomes, interpreting data, and reporting findings, a shared vision for and commitment to the evaluation and program is generated (Altman, 1995; Fetterman, 1996; Patton, 1994). Such partnerships also increase the likelihood that stakehol-

ders will support evaluation efforts and integrate evaluation findings into project improvements. This broad based support is especially important when our evaluations target a cross section of agencies or communities (Millett, 1992) and include programs that target disenfranchised groups such as people in poverty (Stockdill, Duhon-Sells, Olson, & Patton, need date). Active inclusion of multiple stakeholders ensures that the needs and concerns of different constituencies will be represented in the evaluation process.

When conducting a longitudinal evaluation, a collaborative partnership also provides the venue for continually examining the legitimacy and importance of targeted outcomes and for reshaping the evaluation protocol when necessary. Shifts in social/political forces and a changing social context can only be addressed in an evaluation that both observes and adjusts to this dynamism (Levin, 1996). Program planners, implementers, and funders are more likely to support shifts in outcomes and evaluation protocol when they are active participants in this observation and assessment (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In the end an evaluation that adjusts itself accordingly is more likely to inform policy and impact program efficacy (Feterman, 1996).

A collaborative model for evaluation fits well within the guiding values and practices of community psychology. Community psychologists emphasize the value of divergent views and solutions (Rappaport, 1981; Seidman, 1983), the importance of an ecological understanding of behaviour (Kelly, 1967), the significance of understanding local meanings (Kelly, et al., 1988). Empowerment strategies, that enhance the capacity and control of the participating individuals and settings are central to community psychology interventions (Rappaport, 1981). A collaborative approach to evaluation is an effective means for supporting and strengthening the intent of community psychology. By partnering with stakeholders in the design, implementation, and interpretation of the evaluation process a more meaningful evaluation for the targeted context will be created, community capacity will be strengthened, and local ownership for the endeavor will emerge (Fetterman, 1996; Kelly, 1988). Ultimately, successful collaborative partnerships increase the resources made available

for a targeted problem (Nelson, 1994),facilitate the empowerment of the participating community members (Bond & Keys, 1993; Rich, Edelstein, Hallman, & Wandersman, 1995), and increase the efficacy of the community intervention (Altman, 1995).

As researchers involved in numerous evaluation efforts across a variety of problem (e.g., domestic violence, juvenile delinquency, disability rights, out-of-home placements, poor service coordination, employee dissatisfaction, client empowerment, intergroup conflict, positive youth development) and environmental (e.g., schools, organizations, communities, policy) domains, we have strongly embraced and practiced this collaborative model of evaluation. From the onset of all of our evaluation efforts, we have attempted to actively involve stakeholders in all stages of the research process, often viewing ourselves more as facilitators than as evaluators (Dugan, 1996). Many of these collaborations have succeeded, resulting in effective interventions, improved community conditions, and positive stakeholder relations. We have also, more recently, experienced some failures where targeted stakeholders have refused to collaborate resulting in a loss of funding and increased community skepticism about future collaborations.

What caused this stakeholder resistance to the collaborative process? We hypothesize that two factors-the stackholder's epistemology and the collaboration context-played a significant role in shaping the stakeholder's valuing of the collaborative approach. Indeed, collaboration pursuits are only successful if stackholders value such partnerships (Gray, 1985) and assume that such an approach is an important addition to the evaluation process. When this assumption is absent, when stakeholders view collaboration as an unnecessary addition that will diminish the value (or even reliability) of the data gathered, significant and sometimes even impenetrable barriers to forging partnerships emerge. Specifically some funders and community members believe that collaboration will contaminate the evaluation findings, bias results, and decrease the generalizability of findings.

One element that often determines how stakeholders perceive collaboration's impact on the construction of evaluation knowledge is the stakeholders epistemology. Epistemology refers to

the underlying assumptions we hold about knowledge-where does knowledge or reality exist and how can we access it (e.g., Nielson, 1990). Epistemology influences how one approaches problem definition research design, and even the community-evaluator partnerships (Gergen, 1988). Two competing epistemologies that have significantly different implications for collaborative pursuits are discussed in this paper-logical positivism and constructivists paradigms. In addition to embracing different methodologies these epistemologies hold very different assumptions about how problems should be defined and who should be involved in problem definition. In the end, the presence of these different epistemologies across the stakeholders in a collaborative process can create significant barriers to building an effective partnership.

While other's (e.g., Guba & Lincoln, 1989) have discussed the importance of epistemology in directing evaluation efforts, particularly the relationship between the evaluator and the community member, these discussions have ignored the critical role that context plays in determining the feasibility and quality of these partnerships. The presence of a paradigm conducive to a collaborative approach is only a necessary not a sufficient means for ensuring professional/community collaborations. Contextual elements such as the immediat pressures for accountability, historical or political conflicts, and competing demands on time and on resources, can significantly impede the success of a collaborative endeavor (Frost & Egri, 1991). Too often, we ignore the importance of context and simply assume that if stakeholders agree to participate in a collaborative process, our partnership will be successful (Bond, 1990).

Below we describe the simultaneous role of epistomology and context in shaping the collaborative process. We begin with a personal experience that for us highlights the importance of considering these two factors when initiating a colaborative process. We then describe the epistemological and contextual tensions that shape our partnership pursuits. We end with a discussion of strategies for addressing contextual or epistemological inconsistencies.

A collaborative Misstep. The need for all stakeholders to hold an epistemplogy compatible with a collaborative evaluation design and the importance of context became clearer to us in a recent experience we had responding to a request for proposal (RFP). A foundation put out a RFP to conduct a long-term multi-site evaluation of major project it had embarked on several years ago. The project had employed an evaluator, but the foundation officer was not pleased with the evaluation teams efforts thus far. According to the foundation officer, the project's first evaluator was unable to capture the dynamic and evolving processes that were occurring in the project, was rarely seen in the targeted communities, and seemed to exclude community members in the evaluation process. Given the strong community//funder partnership envisioned by the foundation for this project, the lack of a community presence was noted as a particular concern. We speculated that this was primarily due to the traditional evaluation methods employed.

In addition, our informal sources of information suggested that the project had significantly failed to demonstrate the community impact expected by the Foundation's Trustees. Concerned about the possibility of a long term failure, the foundation's staff hired a consultant to facilitate an external review of the project and the first evaluation, and develop a strategic plan and conceptual framework for the project's future. Approximately 3 months after the creation of the project's conceptual framework the RFP and strategic plan were distributed to an invited list of possible candidates (e.g, universities, profit and non-profits consulting companies). The authors of this chapter along with three others formed an interdisciplinary evaluation team to respond to the RFP.

The RFP and supporting documents strongly suggested that the foundation was truly attempting to create sustainable systems change by partnering and not imposing their values and solutions on the specified communities. All documents emphasized the need for community input, the importance of addressing local needs the importance of promoting the community/funder partnership, the importance of allowing goals and outcomes to shift according to the changing community context. To the authors and other evaluation team members, these documents strongly suggested that a collaborative evaluation process that promoted a strong partnership between the community sites, the foundation

and the evaluator was in order. It is also important to note that this project represented a significant departure from the foundation's traditional mode of operations. This foundation was well known for its entrenched hierarchy and patriarchy. As a primary funder in several communities, the foundation became accustomed to dictating which projects would be in operation and the landscape of those operations. Rarely had the foundation involved community members as a partner in designing the programs or evaluations it funded.

During the bidder's conference, held two weeks after the RFP, we became aware that the strong collaborative philosophy articulated in the written documents was not necessarily supported by all of the actions taken and policies supported by foundation members. For example, the foundation officers stated that communities would need to adopt and adapt to the foundation's framework, rather than the foundation assisting and partnering with communities to develop their own framework. In fact, no community members had been involved in the planning or conceptualization process to date. In addition, the previous evaluator, who was present at the bidders conference, noted that the Board of Trustees seemed more interested in the psychometric properties of the methods employed than the ecological validity that community involvement could produce.

Another inconsistent fact that emerged during this conference was the importance the foundation was placing on developing a single set of outcomes that would be tracked throughout the duration (at least 10 years) of the project across all project sites. This emphasis seemed significantly inconsistent with the previous evaluation findings – that identified few shared indicators across the communities – and the conceptual framework – which emphasized the importance of addressing local concerns and being sensitive to shifting social/political forces.

Despite these inconsistencies, and the concerns they raised for us, we decided to focus our efforts on developing an evaluation that would meet the needs laid out in the conceptual framework. In the end, we proposed an evaluation that would be truly participatory and guided by the community. Numerous partnership vehicles would be established to encourage active community/funder involvement in all stages of the evaluation process. Strategic planning retreats would be regularly held to review evaluation findings and the value of targeted outcomes, and to redesign the evaluation protocol, if necessary. Overall, we anticipated building and improving the capacity of each site around the informed use and consumption of evaluation information through the partnership, training and technical assistance. Ultimately, it was the our intention that by the end of this partnership the communities could sustain the evaluation efforts and he funder/community collaboration would be enhanced.

Our proposal was generaly well received by the funder: we were one of two evaluation teams asked to make revisions and submit a final proposal. We initially interpreted this success as an approval for our collaborative evaluation style. In fact, informal sources suggested that the foundation was impressed with our intensive community involvement. Yet, additional interactions with the funders suggested otherwise. In one feedback letter, we learned that the funders perceived our proposal as «too intrusive and too burdensome on the community»; they recommended that we eliminate most of our partnership vehicles and target a minimal number of community members in our collaborative efforts. During one critical conference call, the three community liaisons, foundation employees, were notably absent. The foundation refused our request to contact these liaisons directly to gather the information we needed for the final proposal. In one meeting, where the community liaisons were present significant disagreement across these three employees suggested that even they questioned the legitimacy of involving their own community members in the evaluation process. They noted the burden such collaboration would place on community member's time and the competition for community partnership in their settings. Overall, these liaisons feared that involvement in an evaluation partnership would supplant their own attempts to create partnership vehicles in their communities.

Contrasting perspectives about the importance of community partnerships also emerged from the three program officers. One program officer, who had previously published an article exulting the value of community partnership, supported

our partnership ideas. Another officer significantly questioned the legitimacy of involving community members in the evaluation process. As the disconfirming evidence increased, we became even more convinced that the foundation was not committed to its own conceptual framework of community collaboration. In the end, we were notified that we did not receive the grant.

As we attempted to understand the mounds of conflicting information and feedback we received over the course of this proposal process (approximately four months), two factors continually emerged. First, an active community/collaboration model appeared to run significantly counter to how some of the funders felt evaluation knowledge should be generated. Throughout the proposal process, some of the foundation members were most concerned about objectivity and less concerned about community involvement and data gathering techniques that were ecologically valid. This emphasis ran significantly counter to our own perceptions about what should be valued in this project. In other words, the mode of inquiry we felt was most appropriate for this project contrasted greatly from the mode of inquiry valued by some of the funders. This contrast created significant misunderstandings and we believe, become one of the factors that led to our loss of this contract. A second factor that seemed to explain the inconsistent messages we received was the context in which this evaluation was operating. The trustees demands for immediacy, the foundations patriarchal history, and internal and external pressures for success all created a context which seemed incompatible with collaboration.

Below we describe in more detail the specific epistemological and contextual barriers to collaboration. We follow this discussion with an examination of some effective strategies for addressing these incompatibilities.

Competing Epistemologies. Epistemology refers to the assumptions one holds about how knowledge should be generated, who should be involved in knowledge generation, and the existence of reality (e.g., Nielson, 1990). The epistemology valued by stakeholders significantly influences their reaction to a collaborative proposal or process. Specifically, if stakeholders revere a value-free, objective science than collaboration will be perceived as a contaminant-a practice that will pollute one's pursuit for an absolute truth and consequently resisted. If stakeholders assume that multiple realities exist and that context and personal experience influence one's reality, than collaboration will be viewed as a necessary step in the knowledge construction process, and strongly supported.

In a sense, these two views depict well the competing epistemologies that we confronted in our grant writing experience. They also describe the two different modes of inquiry that currently dominate evaluation science. Historically, evaluation practices have been dominated by the logical positivist approach to inquiry; methods that reify objectivity and the pursuit of the one truth were employed. Recently, evaluation methodologies have entered a new wave or generation (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Shadish, Cook, & Leviton, 1991) with the most recent transformation valuing strong community partnership and a constructivist paradigm. The constructivist epistemology approach to evaluation, what Guba and Lincoln (1989) labeled forth generation evaluation, emphasizes the importance of multiple realities and understanding local meanings. These two epistemologies hold very different assumptions about problem definition and, consequently have significant implications for the collaboration.

Logical Positivism. Logical Positivism, perhaps the most popular epistemology in social sciences, values a reductionistic, objective, expert-directed model of inquiry (Gergen, 1988). This modernist perspective assumes a well-structured, logical universe whose laws and one true reality can be completely understood though science (Polkinghome, 1992). This, positivists believe that any researcher, using reliable, valid methodologies can access this objective world of facts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As such, logical positivism assumes that the knower and the known, or the observer and observed, can and should be separated (Giddens, 1974). The positivist scientist is viewed as an observer independent and separate from the subject of the research. This requires that the scientist and subject remain independent, and this all contact between the two should be minimized. In the end by minimizing interactions between the researcher and subject, objective truth is less likely to be altered (Swigonski, 1994).

Consequently, positivists, in the truest form, have little if any need for collaboration. Since Knowledge is independent from the observer, community members or other stakeholders can offer no additional insight into the phenomenon targeted. In fact, from a positivists perspective, such interactions are likely to contaminate facts. Threaten the assumptions of independence, and ultimately invalidate the research findings. Furthermore, positivists firmly believe that only those skilled in the rigors of scientific methodology should pursue research an expertise exclusively owned by scientists.

This, community members funders, and evaluators embracing a logical positivist perspective typically avoid, resist, or condemn collaborative relationships. Such partnerships are viewed as a cumbersome liability for the evaluation project, threatening the reliability of the methodology and the validity of conclusions. In the case described above, logical positivism seemed to direct the foundation's design of the program's conceptual model and influence the foundation member's reactions to our proposal. As any positivist would, the foundation explicitly excluded community members in the development of the foundation's conceptual plan and had little, if any plans for future community involvement. Similarly, given their empiricists concerns about truth and validity, several foundation members had serious doubts about the legitimacy of our proposed evaluation procedures and requested reduced community partnerships.

When directly confronted with stakeholders that value such empiricism, the evaluator faces a significant challenge. Efforts to build a collaborative partnership could significantly threaten the stakeholder's perceptions of the qualifications of the evaluator and the scientific credibility of the evaluation-certainly concerns we confronted at the foundation. These doubts could in turn, reduce stakholder support for and investment in the evaluation process. While educating stakeholders on the value of a collaborative process may diminish these perceptions it is unlikely to override the long standing biases of positivism. This is particularly true when faced with a context where funding sources are limited and pressures for accountability or social change are high.

Some stakeholders may have a less pernicious reverence of logical positivism they may simply devalue their own role in the collaborative process and view the evaluator as the only expert capable of constructing the evaluation. In our experience, a gentle educational process that highlights the importance of the stakeholders´ role in the process and their expertise in the local context can effectively reduce these concerns.

Because collaborative partnerships have become popular in the evaluation and research process, some stakeholders may voice a support or interest in collaboration, yet value a logical positivism paradigm. The true nature of the stakeholder's epistemological assumptions will eventually reveal them selves, however, as evidenced by strong concerns about the contamination of findings. Or, stakeholders may begin to withdraw support for the partnership efforts and question the knowledge and skills of the evaluator. This describes well the inconsistency we experienced in the above example. The RFP strongly emphasized the need for active community partnerships – which suggested to as that the foundation embraced a constructivist approach to inquiry. Yet, much to our surprise, the actions of the foundation members suggested otherwise. Certainly, the true nature of the foundation's rational for the strong collaborative emphasis in the RFP is unknown to us. But, the strong negative reactions to our collaborative evaluation model were a very tangible indicator that strong community partnerships did not fit with the foundation's view of how evaluations should be conducted.

Constructivism. One epistemology that contrasts greatly with Logical Positivism and appears more consonant with a collaborative evaluation endeavor is constructivism. Constructivism denies the existence of one true reality and instead assumes that reality is socially constructed (Gergen, 1988). Consequently, for constructivists there are as many realities, within a given context, as there are individuals (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). These realities emerge from lived experiences; life experience structures and limits one's understanding (Swigonski, 1994). For example, being a researcher in a major university would lead to a very different experience than being a single mother living in poverty. Thus, the concerns, the strengths, and the desires of women in poverty are very different and

hidden from the researcher. Only until these women share these life experiences with the researcher (Ladner, 1987), or the researcher experiences them personally (Collins, 1989), can legitimate scientific knowledge be produced. This approach requires an active collaboration between the researcher and the women, were the women is viewed as an expert on her own life. In this model of science, a collaborative group process can allow the diferent realities of all stakeholders to emerge, can significantly reduce the partilization of reality, and can increase the likelihood that a shared vision for the future will occur.

In constructivism, the collaborative relationship between scientist and stakeholder becomes the context in which the process of discovery and understanding take place (Kingry-Westergaard & Kelly, 1990). Researcher/subject duality, which logical positivists deem essential to knowledge construction, is regected by constructivists. Instead the interaction between researcher and stakeholder becomes the vehicle for understanding, constructing, and reconstructing knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Constructivists also believe that because knowledge is bound by space and time, the reality seen or understood at one particular point may shift significantly across contexts and across time (Gergen, 1985). This perspective calls for the evaluator and stakeholders to continually revisit the meanings previously constructed and reshape the understandings, such as targeted outcomes, if appropriate. Constructivists naturally assume that the dynamic nature of social phenomenon will shift the realities seen and understood.

In regards to the scientific legitimacy of their endeavors, constructivists are less concerned about objectivity and more focused on issues of trustworthiness and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1986): can insiders and outsiders trust their conclusions; was the evaluation process fair to all stakeholders; do the conclusions represent the concerns and interests of all parties. A strong collaborative partnership between the evaluator and stakeholders protects the trustworthiness and authenticity of the evaluation conclusions. Collaboration ensures that the conclusions drawn are ecologically valid, that is they are credible and legitimate to the insiders and that the voice

of all stakeholders are represented in the process. In the end, collaboration not only ensures that the multiple social realities are considered during the evaluation process but also that the conclusions drawn are legitimate descriptions of the phenomenon targeted.

Clearly, if all stakeholders value a constructivists paradigm, successful collaborative endearvors are much more feasible. These individuals are less likely to question the legitimacy of their involvement, the validity of the multiple realities that emerge the credibility or scientific value of the conclusions drawn. Collaboration becomes a natural byproduct of their own valuing of different perspectives. In our experience, however, while many stakeholders may value their own involvement in their collaborative process, they often have more difficulty in understanding or supporting the involvement of others. This perception is exacerbated when the community targeted has a history of intergroup competition (Gray, 1985) or excluding particular subgroups from decision-making (Bartunek, Foster-Fishman, & Keys, in press). Moreover, while multiple stakeholders may join the collaborative effort, and offer support for a broad- spectrum of partners, the process of collaboration may initially reveal more differences than similarities. Different constituencies within anyone community can hold divergent perceptions of the problem and consequently, competing desires for solutions (Gray, 1985; Kelly, et al, 1988). It is critical during this formative stage to facilitate a process that emphasizes the stakeholder interdependence, by identifying shared goals and visions. Without subverting stakeholder autonomy (see Bartunek, Foster-Fishman, & Keys, in press) for a review of strategies that can facilitate this process).

In conclusion, the stakeholders' epistemology will significantly influence their reaction to a collaborative process. Because epistemology determines the parameters of the researcher/subject relationship, stakeholders who believe that this relationship should be dialectic and central to the knowledge construction process will support collaborative partnerships. Stakeholders who believe that no substantive relationship should evolve between the researcher and the subject will resist evaluation partnerships. While some techniques for addressing the latter as-

sumption are available, such as educating stakeholders about the importance of collaborative relationships, few strategies can effectively overcome these deep beliefs about science and the construction of knowledge. As such, researchers are likely to encounter ongoing resistance to their collaborative endeavors unless all stakeholders hold compatible epistemologies. However, it is important to note that the presence of an epistemology compatible with collaboration, such as constructivism, does not guarantee stakeholder support for a collaborative endeavor. This began critically apparent to us in our grant experience when one program officer who was known for his contextualist beliefs failed to become an advocate for our proposed strong community/university/funder partnerships. At a minimum, the current environment at the foundation, which emphasized immediate results and foundation authority seemed to undermine the program officer's valuing of collaborative evaluations.

Contextual Barriers to Collaboration. All evaluations occur within contexts that provide role and relational boundaries. These boundaries emerge from current social political forces as well as historical dynamics, shift over time, and vary across settings (Frost & Egri, 1991).They create the priorities for and valuing of the evaluation process and the subtext for collaboration. For example, if a community has had negative prior experiences with the local university, community members may be reluctant to volunteer for a collaborative university/community team. Or, if a funder is experiencing increasing external pressure for accountability from its donors or trustees, then the funding officers will most likely stress the need for immediate, outcome data and deemphasize the role of a collaborative process. The unique history and current contextual landscape of each setting ultimately creates an environment that is either hostile, indifferent, or favorable towards collaboration.

Unfortunately, understanding the contextual flavor of the evaluation process becomes complex when we recognize that the evaluation operates whitin different contexts simultaneously (e.g., academia, funder, community). These multiple environmental forces may be in harmony or discordant with each other. For example, the context of academia may (and often does) dictate

a very different set of priorities (e.g., publish or perish) than the targeted community setting (e.g., improve community life). In addition, because the history of roles and relationships determines how a context currently responds to a particular social or political crisis or change (Senge, 1990), different contexts will differentially respond to the same crisis or change. For example, a funding crisis could create a need for increased collaboration across service providers or increased competition – dependent upon the community's history of cooperation.

Our personal experience and a review of the collaboration literature suggest three characteristics of the evaluation context that can significantly influence the appropriateness and success of a collaborative endeavor: 1) a history of intergroup conflict (e.g., Bartunek, Foster-Fishman, & Keys, in press; Hogue, 1991; Gray, 1985; Wood & Gray, 1991); 2) narrow role definitions (e.g., Bond, 1990; Frost & Egri, 1991; Gruber & Trickett, 1988) and 3) current resource constraints (e.g., Hogue, 1991; Keith, et al, 1996). These contextual barriers are described below.

A history of intergroup tensions. A history of intergroup tensions within the multiple groups of a particular community or across the collaboration domains (funder, university, and community) can result in significant resistance to an evaluation partnership (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992). If a community has a history of excluding particular subgroups (Bartunek, Foster-Fishman, & Keys, in press) and/or intergroup/interagency conflict (Gray, 1985), the recruitment of evaluation partners will be difficult, as best. Within such a context, community members often distrust each other as well as the efforts of outsiders who initiate reconciliation and cooperation (Hogue, Perkins, Clark, Bergstrom, & Slinski, 1995). Historically excluded community members question if their participation resembles nothing more than tokenism (Bartunek, Foster-Fishman, & Keys, in press). While important barriers to consider when developing partnerships, these factors can be addressed through effective consensus building techniques. For example, directly communicating the need for a particular stakeholder to be involved, identifying shared goals and visions, and allowing multiple voices to be heard are simple, yet effective

means for promoting inclusion (Bartunek, Foster-Fishman, & Keys, in press).

However, if community groups have negative prior experiences collaborating or working with the funder, the sponsoring university, or with other universities or funders, strong resistance to a multiple stakeholder partnership will emerge (Hogue, et al., 1995; Kelly, 1988). These previous experiences shape the role and relational expectations of the community members (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Funders may also have negative prior experiences with collaboration efforts, with the targeted community, or with the evaluator and the home university. Negative experiences with previous partnerships may cause funders to question the legitimately of collaboration efforts, the capacity of the evaluator to succeed in this initiative, or speculate about the hidden agenda of the other partners (Hogue, 1991). They may cause funders to become entrenched in their own vision about the problem and demand control over the design of the evaluation initiative. For example, in the experience described above it seemed that the failure of the first evaluator to meet the funder's requirements significantly reduced the latitude the foundation was willing to provide the new evaluation group. Many of the questions we were asked in our interviews concerned our presumption that we were capable of developing collaborative partnerships when others (including the funder itself) had failed to do so in these communities. Without significant time spent on rebuilding the trust in these relationships collaboration efforts are unlikely to succeed.

Narrow role definitions. Collaboration is an evolving and ambiguous endeavor (Perkins, Ferrari, Covey, & Keith, 1994), often requiring the enactment and support of new roles for many stakeholders. Collaborative endeavors often provide some participants with their first opportunity to assume a decision-making position in their community. They often require powerful partners (such as community leaders or funders) to share authority and control with others. When stakeholders hold restrictive role definitions for thernselves and prescribe narrow roles for others they are unlikely to adopt or enact these new roles. For example, the foundation we were working with had a long history of patriarchy, both internally and externally. As the primary money

source for many problem domains in several communities, it had experienced the power and privilege of selecting which projects would be funded and the context and shape of their evaluations. Little if any motivation existed for the foundation to shift this history and its role as the «community sugar daddy».

We have also experienced community members who hold very narrow role prescriptions of others, particularly individuals or groups who have been traditionally excluded from positions of power or privilege. For example, in a project where one author was attempting to recruit people with a cognitive disability as partners in a collaborative endeavor, she had contact over 30 community agencies that work with people with disabilities before having one person with mental retardation referred to the project. In the process, many agency leaders commented that none of their clients were capable of assuming such a role.

While the very process of collaboration is one in which roles are redefined and opportunities are made available (Keith, Knox, Perkins, & Blackman, 1996), stakeholders must first perceive the possibility before enacting or supporting these new roles. When these behaviors are viewed as illegitimate or when stakeholders fear the potential loss of political power (Frost & Egri, 1991), the collaboration model is less viable.

Current resource constraints. Collaboration is a resource expensive endeavor and should be engaged in when the benefits outweigh the costs (Perkins, et al., 1994). Perhaps the resource most consumed by evaluation partnerships is stakeholder time: one collaborative endeavor initiated by one of the authors needed 18 monthly meetings before any product was produced. This time is increased when there is a history of intergroup conflict or incompatible priorities or agendas surface. When stakeholders face competing demands on their time, such as other requirements for coalition membership or increased professional or personal responsibilities, their willingness to participate in a collaborative endeavor diminishes significantly. For example, one evaluation designed by two of the authors initially had a strong collaborative element; the funder and several other stakeholders were invited and encouraged to attend weekly evaluation

team meetings. However, shortly before the initiation of the project, the funder experienced a significant reduction in personnel and the one surviving program officer no longer had any time for «such luxuries».

Another resource that influences the viability of collaborative partnerships is the availability of programmatic funds. When funding sources become restricted or diminish significantly, the demands for immediate evaluation feedback increases; funders or program planners need to know which programs should be retained and which should be eliminated. Unfortunately, a collaborative approach to evaluation provides little immediate feedback. The time needed to develop a strong partnership, identify common goals and outcomes interferes with the capacity to immediately collect and interpret data. If the demands for immediate feedback are strong, a collaborative evaluation may be an inappropriate approach. Indeed, one should first evaluate whether working together at another level might be more practical (see Hogue, et al, 1995).

In conclusion, if the conditions necessary for collaboration to occur are absent but evaluation partnerships with community members are desired and still pursued, then significant barriers to future relationships with the targeted community will emerge. Community members including funders, with precious time and energy, perceive ill-fated collaborative endeavors as tokenism and will begin to question the integrity and legitimacy of future evaluation efforts. Prior to initiating any evaluation process, evaluators should conduct a reconnaissance visit (Kelly, 1988) by assessing the context and determining the extent to which its history role prescriptions, and resources would support a collaborative endeavor.

DISCUSSION

The experience described above indicates that the field's preference for collaborative models of science and intervention are, while admirable a bit naive. This should not have come as a surprise to us given an ecological understanding of behavior. In other words, the settings into which collaborative models of intervention are inserted are often guided by other models of behavior. A critical examination of the context of community research yields the following analysis. First, it is important that our models of behavior have utility not only as heuristic abstractions but that they also are used to understand community collaboration. This means that these models have explanatory value for our understanding of the actions of community psychologists and the actions of their collaborators. Second the clash of the collaborative paradigm with many settings in the real world has implications for training. Merely presenting idealistic models of collaborative activity in the absence of understanding competing models is not likely to be helpful. Third, it is also important to understand that there may be situations in which the collaborative paradigm will simply not be viable. The establishment of criteria or decision rules which can inform judgements concerning receptive situations should also be helpful.

The clash of paradigm and reality. There was little doubt that even for those senior members of the team, the experience described above was disconcerting. It is a jarring experience when those with whom we seek to collaborate are not interested. Given the theoretical models of behavior which are prominent in the field, this should not be surprising. Community psychologists adhere to models of behavior which encompass multiple influences including the political, historical, organizational, fiscal, interpersonal, and individual. However the complexity of these models is often forgotten when collaborative situations are approached. In fact, our models of collaborative research often fail to account for multiple influences on the investigator engaged in action research or the stakeholders we target (e.g., Bond, 1990; Fairweather, 1979; Kelly, 1988). Many of these models of collaboration interestingly prescribe a unilateral model of intervention and science. It is most likely the case that these models of intervention and science are relatively new and, as a result, experience with their actual implementation has not been extensively described. In short, this paper is a beginning attempt to critically examine the ecological influences on the work of community psychologists and how they affect models of intervention and science.

The project described above exemplifies this issue in three ways. First, the funding source for

our proposed collaboration publicly espoused a model of science congruent with our own collaborative approach. This model was communicated in the request for proposals to which we were responding and was expressed by key individuals in the funding organization at the bidders conference. Further, key organization members had described the collaborative model of evaluation in their own scholarly work. However, it soon became clear that the context in which the funding agency operated precluded adherence to a collaborative model of evaluation and science. The organization apparently had too long of history of operating in a paternalistic and unilateral model of evaluative projects. Funder, it did not appear to be in a position to «trust» its collaborators sufficiently for the model to ever begin.

Second, the funding source was openly uncomfortable with the collaborative model of science in practice. Once past the conceptual grant writing and discussion phase, the funding source actively stopped collaborative attempts. The clearest example of this clash was the rapid denial of a request to involve the local stakeholders in the evaluation planning process. As described above, this was a clear early indicator that the «music and the words did not go together». Involvement of all key parties in the early planning of the evaluation is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the execution of a collaborative model of evaluation. While it is no guarantee that true collaboration will occur, it is difficult to imagine cooperation happening in the absence of joint planning from the very beginning of the evaluative process. The clash of paradigms between a positivist evaluative science and a collaborative, constructivist model was again evident.

Third, the funding source was interested in an «auditing» function being part of the evaluative process. It was clear that the funding source's relationship to community settings was vertical in nature. Vertical models of intervention may or may not include evaluative components. However, when they do, fiscal and outcome monitoring are necessary ingredients. Questions raised by the research team in the proposal writing process made it clear that the evaluation would need to include reports on the compliance of the community settings and programs. The funding

source's Board of Directors were clearly interested in making sure they were «getting their money's worth». This value seemed to dictate a model of evaluation incongruent with a collaborative process. While the debate as to whether or not this is a desirable goal for a funding source's Board is beyond the scope of this paper, it was clear that this contextual event was interpreted as being at odds with a collaborative model of action and science.

Essentially, there is a very simple story to be told here. The collaborative approach to community science can only be understood within the contexts into which it is functioning. It cannot and does not operate in a vacuum. The field of community psychology has spent insufficient time attending to this very important set of phenomena. The contexts of the problems addressed *and* the contexts in which interventions and science occur must both be understood.

Implications for education. The clash of paradigms has direct implications for educational programs and experiences. The importance of actual community involvement, the importance of understanding context in community interventions and the action research model are all presented as critical ingredients to effective training. Based on the experience described above, it would appear to be the case that our educational efforts need to account for these three dimensions if our graduates are to be equipped to engage in collaborative efforts.

One of the most important lessons learned from the situation described in this paper is that the importance of context was only understood through actual participation in the collaborative evaluation endeavor. This experience would not have occurred had we not taken our «favorite model of research» into the field. While hind site makes the experience very understandable, it was certainly not clear in the beginning. It was our distined impression that the theoretical base of collaborative models of evaluation are based on the assumption that the environment encountered will be receptive to and agree with such a model. Our experience opened our eyes to the fact that models of science and context, and the interaction between them, can play very important roles in the veracity of the collaboration model upon implementation. It seems imperative that educational experiences provide the oppor-

tunity for such insights to occur through actual practice.

This experience of taking our collaborative model out into the field provided another experiential source of information concerning the importance of multilevel perspectives on behavior within community context. We realized that we were dealing with more than the individuals involved. Our inability to critically understand the context led to a less than desired outcome. Further, examination of our own context within the «ivory tower», lacking prior exposure to or histirical understanding of this funding source confounded the experience. We were again powerfully reminded of the importance of taking our contextual lens with us when we implement our models of science in community settings. Training in the actual use of such «lenses» is vital to education in community psychology.

A final implication for education is the importance of the action research model. Upon is that the action research model prescribes a proactive stance by the community scientist. Many of the issues faced in the experience described here could have been addressed had the research team been part of the initiative's initiation. The fact that we were entering six years after the initiation of the action conponent of the initiative provided an obstacle to collaboration. In our experience, our educational models are often silent on the critical ingredients of «starting» a collaborative effort. The second important ingredient of the action research model is the importance of the investigators being involved in and having some responsibility for the intervention conponent of the initiative. While the intention of the research team was to gain this involvement through the collaborative process, our «late arrival on the scene» coupled with the model of evaluation desired by the holder of the purse strings, made this accomplishment impossible. Again, the importance of providing educational experiences with expose students to the methods for «being there in the beginning» are highlighted.

How will you know when it's time to patch the windows. The well worn proverb states «she who lives in a glass house, should not throw stones». While it is the case that this proverb is often found to be true as we have just demonstrated, it would also be useful to know when it's time to patch the windows so the roof will stop leaking. This describes the final set of issues which emerged from our experience. The following is an attempt to begin to delineate a set of criteria for determining the likelihood of a successful collaborative evaluation experience, it is intended to be a beginning heuristic rather than an exhaustive list.

1. **Collaborative efforts are more likely to succeeded if they begin before important values are negotiated and decisions made**. At the very essence of a collaborative science is the negotiation of key values and intervention/research decisions (Butterfoss, Goodman, & Wandersman, 1993). These negotiations and agreements apply to interpersonal and organizational roles, foci of intervention, budgets, data collection procedures, and research questions (Kelly, 1988). Without joint decision-making on such important community intervention/research efforts, the collaborative endeavor is unlikely to engender stakeholder commitment and trust (Gray, 1985).

2. **Collaborative efforts are more likely to succeed if all key participants are involved in the processes from the beginning**. It would have been a very different situation if the evaluation team described in this article had been part of the birth of this initiative. The staggered entry of stakeholders impeded the development of shared norms and goals essential elements to successful collaborations (Bartunek, Foster-Fishman, & Keys, in press). When stakeholders enter collaborative partnerships at different time points, they are likely to perceive different realities resent their exclusion at the project's onset, and subsequently resist or question the previous negotiations.

3. **Collaborative efforts are more likely to succeed if key participants all play multiple roles**. Part of the very process of collaboration involves understanding the values, positions, and experiences of other key participants (Frost & Egri, 1991). To succeed this involves processes which are the antithesis of modern day specialization. This requires that the community psychologist play multiple roles in a collaborative effort. It also requires collaborating with organizations, groups, and individuals who are willing to reciprocate such activities (Hogue, 1991).

4. **Collaborative efforts are more likely to succeed if action and research are intricately intertwined**. The example described in this chapter clearly described the problems with bifurcation of the action and research role. The joint commitment to beneficial change and the systematic examination of impact are part of the necessary conditions for successful collaboration. The equality of these two agenda is essential to their mutual accomplishment. Action without commitment to science is pure polities. Evaluation without action is irrelevant science.

5. **Collaborative efforts are more likely to succeed of they have a good deal of time to develop and occur**. True collaboration involves «being there in the beginning», «seeing things through», «staying around for the finish», and «trying it again if need be». This level of joint commitment to the past, present, and future characterizes true collaboration. While individuals may come and go over the years of a joint community involvement, it is key that the major constituencies remain involved.

In many ways these five criteria offer the community researcher a template for situations in which to work. Failing to find each of these will have disastrous consequences for the collaboration. It's certainly not the case that any situation represents a true amalgam of all of these desirable characteristics. In other words, they are both a template for decisions about selecting situations in which to work and a criteria to be attained in communitywork. It has been our experience that failure in any of these key areas makes the collaborative effort much more difficult. Failure in more than one may describe the situation in which the community psychologist needs to consider other alternatives.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is the description of effective evaluation partnerships of community based programs involving the evaluators, the organizations, and the communities. The evaluation may adress problems like domestic violence, juvenile delinquency, people with disabilities or contexts as schools, organizations, communities or policies.

The experience of a Foundation that intended to have it´s community based program evaluated is described, and resisted to consult with the community about their needs. Through this example are identified the criteria that may influence the sucess of the collaborative evaluations between communities, organizations and evaluation professionals that consider themselves as facilitators.

Key words: Evaluation, Community-based programs, Partnerships.

RESUMO

O artigo tem como objectivo a descrição do funcionamento de uma parceria eficaz entre os profissionais de avaliação de Programas de base comunitária, as organizações e as comunidades envolvidas. A avaliação pode abranger problemas vários como violência doméstica, delinquência juvenil, pessoas com deficiência ou contextos como escolas, organizações, comunidades ou mesmo a implementação de políticas.

É descrita uma experiência de uma Fundação que pretendia ver o seu Programa de Intervenção Comunitária Avaliado, mas que resistia em recolher as informações junto da população sobre as suas necessidades. A partir deste exemplo, são identificados alguns dos critérios que podem estar na base do sucesso vs. insucesso das avaliações de programas comunitários numa perspectiva de colaboração entre a comunidade, as organizações e os avaliadores que se apresentam como facilitadores.

Palavras-chave: Avaliação, Programas comunitários, Parcerias.