

Is Collaborative, Community-Engaged Scholarship More Rigorous Than Traditional Scholarship? On Advocacy, Bias, and Social Science Research

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Abstract

Contrary to the charge that advocacy-oriented research cannot meet social science research standards because it is inherently biased, the authors of this article argue that collaborative, community-engaged scholarship (CCES) must meet high standards of rigor if it is to be useful to support equity-oriented, social justice agendas. In fact, they argue that CCES is often more rigorous than traditional scholarship. The authors draw from cases of CCES that they conducted to provide evidence and examples. They discuss the importance of relationship building and trust in addressing the tensions that can arise between the demands of knowledge production and action-oriented social change.

Keywords

action research, activist scholarship, social activism, urban, research methods, community partnerships

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Collaborative, community-engaged scholarship (CCES) faces a number of challenges from traditional social scientists. Perhaps none is more salient, and frustrating, than the notion that there is a trade-off between rigor and advocacy in such research. In our view, rigor and advocacy go hand in hand. No advocacy agenda can be enhanced by research that is not perceived as rigorous. In fact, in some ways, collaborative research can be understood as more rigorous than traditional research approaches and sometimes leads to knowledge that would go untapped in traditional social science approaches.

Nevertheless, marrying rigor with advocacy is not always easy. As practitioners of CCES, we have encountered some important tensions in our work. In this article, we draw from case studies of our own collaborative research to illustrate the rigor of community-based research, to show how it can be more rigorous than traditional, detached research in some ways, and to draw important lessons about addressing the tensions that arise when academics and their community partners seek to conduct rigorous research that supports community-based action.

By CCES, we mean research that is conducted with community or educational activist groups that addresses issues of equity and social justice. Following the Introduction to this special issue, we use CCES as an umbrella term that includes a variety of forms, like community-based research or action research. Although there are a variety of specific research methods used in this type of scholarship, they all embody a set of shared principles (McReynolds & Shields, 2015; Nyden, Hossfeld, & Nyden, 2012; O'Meara & Rice, 2005; Strand, Cutforth, Stoecker, Marullo & Donahue, 2003), including the following: CCES is a collaborative enterprise between academic researchers and community members; CCES validates multiple sources of knowledge and promotes the use of multiple methods of discovery and dissemination of the knowledge produced; and CCES has as its goal not just knowledge production but also social action and social change for the purpose of achieving social justice. In that sense, community-engaged scholars are involved in the work of advocacy for changes in policy or practice.

By advocacy, however, we do not mean advocating *for* communities. Rather, we mean working *with* communities to advocate for change. Successful movements for social justice have always combined building power among those most affected with allies like researchers and many others to create a larger and more powerful movement (Oakes & Rogers, 2005). Research has an important role in creating "knowledgeable power" (Warren, 2014), that is, the power created by community organizing and advocacy efforts that combine grassroots organizing with systematic research and data analysis.

In saying that CCES involves advocacy, we mean that this type of research is designed to advance both knowledge about inequality in all its forms and action to advance equity. In other words, while knowledge production is the immediate goal of community-engaged scholarship, such research is also meant to contribute to the broader movement for social justice.

Rigor Not Advocacy

In our view, the real question to ask when determining the quality and usefulness of CCES, is not whether it exhibits advocacy, but rather, whether it is rigorous—a question for all forms of research. Many forms of research have an outcome of interest to the investigators, and the research findings describe processes that lead to this outcome or analyze factors that produce these outcomes. This is particularly true for policy-oriented research in fields like education. Many education researchers, for example, develop programs and then test them in experimental trials or in other ways (Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy, 2003). CCES is not different in substance from these other forms of research, although it is often seen as different and more suspect as biased (Tittle, 2004).

No research is purely objective. Values and personal standpoints affect all forms of research, as many scholars, whether community-engaged or not, have long pointed out (Collins, 2000; Milner, 2007). Researchers bring underlying assumptions that shape the questions asked, the data considered relevant and the methods used. Researchers have an obligation to identify the biases they bring to their research and take steps to mitigate such bias (Maxwell, 2005).

In our view, the real issue is not whether collaborative community-based research is rigorous but rather how rigor is defined. It is a given that rigorous research should use appropriate and systematic methods, stand up to critique by knowledgeable parties, and consider contrary evidence and alternative hypotheses (Maxwell, 2005). But rigor is often used as a code word for a set of practices that align themselves with detached research, rather than engaged research. As Davies and Dodd (2002) note,

If rigor is understood only in terms of a structured, measurable, systemized, ordered, uniform and neutral approach, then other research methods that allow flexibility, contradictions, incompleteness, or values will always appear “sloppy,” epitomizing everything that is “nonrigor” and therefore lacking in credibility. (p. 280)

Many critics perhaps suspect that this type of research is designed to produce results that “the community wants.” But community organizations have

an interest in the credibility and legitimacy of the research they rely upon to improve their practice or use to advocate for changes in policy or practice. Research that is not credible will not advance their cause; research that proves what they already think will not improve practice. Groups do not learn from research that simply confirms their agenda or justifies their grant proposals. True advocacy research that helps community partners is critical research.

We are not alone in trying to reclaim the concept of rigor so that it applies to community-engaged research. Shor and Freire (1986) argue that the traditional meaning of rigor needs to be redefined, calling for a “creative rigor” that critiques the authoritarian way of transferring knowledge “which mechanically structures education, and discourages us from the responsibility of recreating ourselves in society” (p. 77). Instead, Shor and Freire propose “a creative pedagogy which seeks to reinvent knowledge situated in the themes, needs, and language of the students (and communities), as an act of illuminating power in the society” (p. 81). This notion of creative rigor resonates with the main principles elaborated in other works on CCES like *Community-Based Research in Higher Education* (Strand, Cutforth, Stoecker, Marullo & Donahue, 2003).

We also agree with other scholars (e.g., Fine, 2008; Hale, 2008; Shor & Freire, 1986) who have argued that research can actually be more rigorous when it is engaged because it is accountable to input and critique from a more diverse set of actors—including those both in the academy and in the community. Newer work on “impact validity” raises similar criteria, that research be designed with consideration for its contributions to social and political change (Massey & Barreras, 2013).

Indeed, some types of traditional, detached research have no accountability beyond the individual researcher. While most are accountable to a scholarly community, these scholarly communities can be insular. They may endorse stereotypes that are shared widely within the research community but lack validity in relevant communities. There is a long history of White researchers studying Black communities, for example, and reinforcing stereotypes even though their findings were published in peer-reviewed journals and accepted as rigorous (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). Many indigenous scholars critique traditional anthropology and its widely accepted findings for its contribution to colonizing assumptions (L. T. Smith, 1999).

From this point of view collaborative research can be considered more rigorous than more traditional forms because it must demonstrate its credibility to a broader audience that brings a more diverse set of questions and standpoints to bear. In collaborative work, there is accountability to partners and to the demands of practice. In this article, we intend to advance this discussion by elaborating multiple ways in which CCES can be considered

more rigorous than detached scholarship and bring to light new knowledge that would otherwise go unnoticed.

This is not to say that collaborative researchers do not face some tensions between rigor and advocacy. Research is the specialized focus of scholars; community participants have many demands on their time and, in the end, focus on action or practice and getting results (Stoecker, 2012). Activists willing to engage in research see it as important, but as one among many important practices. In addition, community organizations may have an immediate, short-term interest in the publication of findings or accounts that benefit their agenda, and therefore resist research findings that identify weaknesses in their efforts even if analyzing these weaknesses contributes important lessons for improving practice in the broader field of organizing for change.

There may be cases where publishing the results of research may do real harm to community participants. These are difficult ethical issues for community-engaged scholars. However, they are not unique to this research approach. Standard human subjects protection asks researchers to limit harm and gives participants the right to withdraw from research at any time without penalty. If community participants in collaborative research believe the harm is too great, institutional review boards and the ethical obligations of scholars give them the right to withdraw their participation as well. In some cases that could mean the research is not published.

In the following pages, the authors describe research projects that combine rigor and advocacy. They illustrate ways that CCES has led to rigorous research that creates knowledge that supports social action. We then draw from these cases to discuss ways in which CCES can be more rigorous than detached scholarship and draw some lessons for addressing the tensions that inevitably arise when scholars and activists collaborate to build knowledge and advocate for change agendas.

Insurance Redlining: A Strategic Collaborative— Gregory Squires

In 1988, a sales manager for the American Family Insurance Company told one of his agents, in a tape recorded discussion, “Very honestly, I think you write too many blacks . . . You got to sell good, solid premium-paying white people . . . They own their own homes, the white works” (Lynch, 1997, p. 159). This conversation reveals the deep-seated racial bias that existed in the home insurance industry that both motivated me to conduct research in support of antidiscrimination campaigns and, when revealed, helped one campaign win a significant victory in Milwaukee.

Since the late 1970s, I have conducted research on insurance redlining practices, which, in conjunction with the work of other scholars, the organizing activity of several community-based organizations, and creative legal advocacy, has led to some significant changes in the way the home insurance industry serves communities of color. The following pages describe the involvement of collaborative research, organizing efforts, and law enforcement that culminated in a favorable settlement of one lawsuit and set the table for subsequent victories. The context in which the research was conducted—particularly the array of other available financial and non-financial resources—proved to be a key factor in these outcomes. But it was the actions of a variety of actors exploiting that context which produced important transformations in the way this vital financial service is provided in the nation's metropolitan areas.

The American Family Case

My initial foray into the issue of insurance redlining involved a study of the distribution of home insurance policies in Chicago that I coauthored while working for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (Squires & DeWolfe, 1979). This project was carried out in collaboration with Gale Cincotta and her staff at the National Training and Information Center and National People's Action, which were affiliated community organizations with chapters in cities across the country. The study documented the lack of service provided to the city's non-White neighborhoods. Shortly after release of the report, Cincotta's group won a significant victory: It received a 1 million dollar grant from Allstate Insurance Company to carry out its organizing and community reinvestment activities, culminating its long campaign against the company, of which the Civil Rights Commission report was just one small piece.

I subsequently published several scholarly journal articles as well as industry trade and popular press op-ed pieces on insurance redlining (see, for example, DeWolfe, Squires, & DeWolfe, 1980; Squires, DeWolfe, & DeWolfe, 1979; Squires & Vélez, 1987; Squires, Vélez, & Taeuber, 1991). In the meantime, I moved to the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee and shortly after was contacted by attorneys for the plaintiffs in the case of *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) v. American Family* in which the company was accused of redlining Milwaukee's Black community. Residents of those communities had reported several incidents in which they believed they had been denied home insurance policies by the company because of their race and the racial composition of the neighborhoods in which they lived. Insurance redlining became a topic of debate at

churches, within the NAACP and other social justice organizations, and among lawyers who had developed long-term working relationships with these groups on a variety of civil rights issues. These community organizations were out ahead of the academic world in identifying this issue. During my initial meetings with plaintiffs and their lawyers, we sketched out the type of research they might want conducted, identified experts who could carry out the work, and discussed remedial actions they would request. I also coauthored one of the expert reports in which we mapped out the location of American Family's agents, documenting the heavy concentration of their offices in White neighborhoods throughout the metropolitan area. The US\$14.5 million settlement that followed was quite favorable for the plaintiffs. The company committed to open new agencies in Milwaukee's Black community, increase the number of policies it wrote in those areas, provide funds for home improvement and other community redevelopment purposes, increase the number of minority employees within the company, eliminate underwriting guidelines that adversely affected minority neighborhoods, and take other steps to better serve previously redlined neighborhoods (Lynch, 1997). Perhaps more significantly, this case helped create effective networks informed with this new knowledge within and among fair housing advocates (e.g., National Fair Housing Alliance), allies in media outlets (e.g., CNN, *Milwaukee Journal*), scholars who conducted some of the critical research (e.g., George Galster and William Velez), and law enforcement agencies which applied pressure on the insurer (e.g., Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice [DOJ] and some state insurance regulators), all of which led to future research, organizing, and successful legal action.

Keys to the Collaboration

In the 1990s, fair housing organizations across the country conducted their own research into the practices of several major insurance companies and settled favorably administrative complaints that had been filed with U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) against Allstate, State Farm, and other major insurers; they also won an important lawsuit in which a jury found Nationwide in violation of fair housing rules (S. L. Smith & Cloud, 1997). The Clinton Administration had made a commitment to more effective fair housing law enforcement, which facilitated these developments. Redlining has a long history. But circumstances came together to realize important changes in policy and practice during these years, in no small part because of the rigor of the research.

First, while it was evident that the parties to these events were not neutral, the scholars, fair housing advocates, and attorneys who came together all had

shared interests and recognized the importance of rigorous and objective research to achieving their mutual objectives. Given the large financial resources of the industry they were addressing, anything less would have easily been dismissed by the courts and administrative agencies to which the advocates were appealing, and consequently of no value to them.

Second, the positive outcomes clearly depended upon the combination of sound social science research, the systematic knowledge of community organizations and many ordinary citizens, and solid legal expertise. Although generally not formally trained in social science research methods, people who lived and worked in underserved areas provided vital knowledge that brought the public's attention to these issues and served as equal partners in the campaigns.

Marrying rigor with advocacy, however, required shared commitments and trust. All parties in this case shared a commitment not just to understanding the reality of insurance industry practices but also to changing those that were problematic. The resources that all parties brought to the research and the campaigns were aimed at significant transformation in the way home insurers served the nation's metropolitan areas and, for the reasons discussed, they were successful in doing so.

Finally, participants built trust with each other. Community partners would not have shared their knowledge and the researchers would not have invested their time if they did not have faith and trust in each other. These relationships were built over years in which long-term relationships were established among a handful of academics, lawyers, the NAACP, and other similar organizations.

Combining rigor and advocacy proved successful in this case also because of the array of contextual factors that came together. The American Family case was filed in 1990 after more than 2 years of advocacy and investigations and was not settled until 1995. During those years, American Family received substantial negative publicity in local and national media. One CNN feature story presented particularly concrete evidence of racial discrimination to a national audience. Perhaps most significantly, the DOJ, which was conducting its own investigation of American Family at the time, announced in 1994 that it planned to file a lawsuit against the company (Ritter, 1997). With the resources of DOJ added to the mix, the company finally decided to settle.

Rigorous research, organizing, and legal action were all among the necessary ingredients to achieve the strategic objectives. Meanwhile, community organizations placed a research agenda on redlining on the doors of the academic world. Perhaps the most important lesson is that, once again, context matters. But it is also the case that when opportunity knocks, if there is no preparation in the sense of building relationships and trust, that door will not be opened.

Respecting Coproducers of Knowledge—Celina Su

Over the years, I have heard consistent complaints of “research fatigue” from some community leaders. Such leaders stated that they were tired of reporters, academics, and foundation officers conducting “drive-by” interviews, with a set agenda—only to never be heard from again. We were getting diplomas and promotions with these publications, and what were they getting? I have tried to take a different approach, to build deep and sustained collaborations with community organizations and this required open discussion and trust building.

When I approached some community organizations working on education reform in the South Bronx in the early 2000s, for instance, they demanded to know what I might offer in return for their time. I offered to present books on community organizing and lead discussions (without academic jargon), to report back whatever analyses I performed along the way, and to give them opportunities to respond to my findings. Ensuring that my research was relevant to their interests in these ways immediately increased access to and helped to establish trust with these community partners (Jagosh et al., 2012).

I also made a case for why my research would not simply replicate what had already been published. At one organization, board members granted me access because they were impressed with one of my research questions, which focused on an aspect of their work that interested them and that they had not reflected upon before.

These board members also wondered whether, given the fact that most of the books they had read were written by older White men, a scholarly inquiry by a younger woman of color might highlight different insights into their work. It did not seem to me that they held essentialist views on scholars by race (as if White men necessarily thought X, and a Brazilian Chinese American woman like me necessarily thought Y); but rather they thought that our different positionalities (by race, gender, disciplinary training, and other axes of social position) shaped our work (Hale, 2008) and might produce some different findings. In response, I had to articulate potential biases and assumptions in my research early on.

When I think about rigor in my research, I think about the approach I take to collaboration. My analyses remain simultaneously *both* sympathetic with and critical of the community-based organizations and institutions with whom I work. I have, for instance, examined strengths and weaknesses of different strategies with members of a social change organization, ultimately coming to a conclusion in agreement with some members, but not others. Here, I reflect on the ways in which collaborative research efforts helped me gain insights I believe I would not have otherwise.

The Power of Experiential Data

By 2006, I had spent roughly 4 years observing the work of education organizing groups in New York City. I learned that there is more than one way to think about rigor in collaborative research. Experiential data, that is, the experiences of participants in organizing processes, can be powerful contributions to knowledge that creates social change.

For example, at one point, a coalition of more than two dozen youth organizations met with then-Chancellor Joel Klein about the use of force in schools by more than 5,000 security agents and 200 armed officers. The students presented 7,500 postcards signed by fellow students, denouncing the police tactics. They requested data that examined not only incidence rates but also graduation rates. They requested that the administration consider addressing infractions like tardiness via school-based measures, like detention, rather than via the Police Department. When Chancellor Klein repeated his argument that the police were effective, one young woman pleaded, “You keep staring at your piece of paper and referring to questionable ‘data.’ . . . Look up and listen to us . . . We are the data” (Alonso, Anderson, Su, & Theoharis, 2009).

At first glance, city administration data might appear to be neutral and rigorous (partly because of their scale), in contrast to self-interested, “biased,” and specious student observations. By insisting that their experiences embodied data, however, these young people were not just advocating for specific policies or outcomes; in fact, that goal was secondary to their primary claims as legitimate stakeholders in policy and as potential coproducers of knowledge. Statistical data not only abstracted but also distorted their stories. They were not statistics. Their direct experiences mattered and they mattered.

Refining Research Questions and Conceptual Frameworks

Collaborative processes have increased the rigor of my research by revealing the disconnections, omissions, and silences in my case studies, as well as suggesting new lenses to my research. In my work with education organizing groups, for instance, I originally paid attention to the different groups’ arguments for education reform; I did not identify their discursive styles as an important facet of their work. Focusing only on their campaign arguments, the youth activists’ campaign strategies looked quite similar to those of adult-led groups. In discussing findings with these students, I began to see the performative, rather than communicative, aspects of the youth’s work—their attempts to change the roles they were given by popular lines of discourse. The youth were strategic in how they attempted to subvert their assigned roles. Even in their dress, they deliberated when to “perform” the role of the “authentic” inner-city students for photo-ops with elected officials. Such

performative work differentiated the youth-led strategies from the adult-led ones, so they no longer appeared so similar. My finding on the students' counter-scripting and counter-staging came from a collaborative process, in which the youth also interpreted data and gave me feedback on my analyses, illuminating *how* my first comparative analyses did not reflect their lived experience, and helping to reveal what was missing (Su, 2010).

Informing and Improving Surveys and Policies

More traditional studies compare the efficacy of policies established in a top-down manner; collaborative research efforts prompt participants to create testable policy proposals of their own. Interviewees and community members in my study emphasized the extent to which bottom-up data collection is often integral to efforts to discover what works. This kind of collaboration with community partners in quantitative research can make those studies more rigorous and relevant to change agendas. For example, in New York City's participatory budgeting process, local residents help to allocate their City Council members' discretionary funds (Su, 2014). I am a member of the citywide steering committee and research board for this process. We found that constituent input is essential to writing surveys that will actually get distributed and completed, and that will yield useful information. Together we asked, how should we phrase questions so that participants do not fall prey to social desirability bias? Which questions are so sensitive that undocumented immigrants are apt to lie in their answers? The researchers tended to suggest questions that had already appeared on established surveys, like the American Community Survey or the General Social Survey. The other research board members, especially budget delegates and community organizers, helped us to ensure that the survey questions got at the key factors facilitating or inhibiting their work. For instance, one question concerned how participants found out about the budgeting process. The initial draft offered a large number of answer options drawn from the get-out-the-vote literature. However, community activists warned us that the drafted version would turn off voters. They challenged us to not "just accumulate . . . data," but to test specific theories with our questions (e.g., that personal contact matters), and ask respondents specifically about phone trees, door-knocking, and practices we could implement if found to be relevant (Kasdan & Markman, 2017).

Many other experiences in CCES like these have convinced me of two key ways in which community-based research efforts might help to improve research practices and resulting policies. First, participants are able to systematically raise issues of intersectionality, highlighting the particular but patterned experiences of especially vulnerable groups. In my experience,

participants are the first to point out which outreach strategies might not succeed with women from certain communities, or that generic anti-bullying resources for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) youth might not adequately address the needs of youth of color who, compared with their White counterparts, fear police harassment as much as high school bullies.

Second, participants drew deeply upon bodily experiences and local knowledge in the research. Local knowledge consists of alternate, site-specific knowledge that cannot be easily summarized as general principles or transferred to other contexts (Scott, 1998). This knowledge did not replace the researchers' and policymakers' technical expertise, but it complemented it. It also helped to ground so-called "best practices," to adjust policies so that they would not be blindly applied in New York City as they were in places like Louisville or Guadalajara. Beyond the standard ethical protocols mandated by institutional review boards, then, collaborative research also necessitates subtle ethical protocols regarding respect—for different bodies of knowledge, and for potentially different policy implications stemming from the analyses.

Co-Learning Across the Collaboration

In codesigning research that will be useful to communities, we need to be concerned with rigor but also ensure that community members have the skills needed to interpret and use this rigorous research. The youth in the opening anecdote had received training in statistical analysis, governmental policy-making, and education policy, and they could analyze the arguments and methodologies of different studies. Without training, participants can appear to be ill-informed in their conversations with city agency representatives, feel flummoxed by technicalities, and be unable to question the larger regulations and implications of their research.

In these cases, I spent enough time with members to earn their trust, learn how to increase response rates, and acquire a sense of the research questions with which *they* were concerned. I took the time to work iteratively with informants to critically examine my analytical frameworks. Above all, engaging in community-based research has allowed me to articulate and see the potential implications of my research up close, and to be kept on my toes by the research projects' ultimate stakeholders. In this way, I have sought to connect rigor and advocacy in advancing educational and social justice.

Community-Engaged Research With Community Organizing Groups—Mark R. Warren

For most of my career, I have studied community and youth organizing efforts to advance educational justice, racial equity, and community development. I

have often chosen to study relatively successful models of organizing to document and analyze organizing strategies and processes—identifying how the organizers do their work and why, and the results achieved. Most researchers and educators hold deficit views of low-income communities of color, perceive people as passive victims of oppression who need to be helped by professionals, and believe that elites drive social improvement and social change processes. By documenting the struggles of people on the ground, and highlighting the creative and sophisticated strategies groups have developed to organize for change, my research is intended to shift the dominant paradigm toward respect for grassroots leadership. I also believe it is important to analyze these organizing strategies to build theory and practical knowledge about effective ways communities can organize for change.

My approach to community engagement is to collaborate with the organizations I study. I consult with the groups throughout the process—discussing with them research questions, research design, and data collection. I discuss findings and insights with partners and receive their feedback. I share a draft of the written work. I listen carefully to feedback at all stages but, in the end, I am responsible for the content of the final product.

When I was at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, I co-led with Karen Mapp a group of 15 doctoral students who formed teams to conduct case studies of six community organizing groups that had achieved significant success in affecting public education in their localities (Warren, Mapp, & the Community Organizing and School Reform Project, 2011). We intended to document the value of low-income communities of color building the power to create equity-oriented change in public education. In contrast to top-down school reform models, we were advocating for the kind of transformational change in public education that would only come with active participation and meaningful roles for parents, young people, and other members of the communities most affected by educational inequities and failures. I think our partners hoped to get recognition and publicity for their hard work from our project. They also hoped to learn new lessons about their organizing because an outside set of eyes examined their work.

What Is a Fair and Balanced Critique?

In our collaboration with the groups, however, we agreed to two things. First, we would start out by understanding their organizing work from their point of view and that their voices would hold a prominent place in our account. But second, we would collect data systematically, gather other points of view and develop our own independent analysis. We would be looking for tensions and unmet challenges in their organizing, believing that a fair and balanced account would contribute knowledge to the broader field of organizing.

When we shared drafts of the case studies, the groups appreciated the research and writing and mostly added information to make the analysis more nuanced and complete. However, the process was not without its tensions; for example, when the team visited Denver for the Padres y Jovenes Unidos (P&JU) case. P&JU had said that political education sessions constituted the primary strategy in their organizing approach. However, the team pointed out that, in the five weeklong visits they had conducted over the year, they had never seen the organization hold a single political education session. At first, P&JU organizers reacted strongly, believing that they were misrepresented. The students went back to their hotel room that night and decided they needed to demonstrate their willingness to listen and discuss the issue. They returned the next day and held a series of structured conversations with P&JU organizers and leaders. By the end of the day, a consensus had been reached that, indeed, the group had not emphasized political education that year. However, the reasons had to do with a transition in organizing staff and the inclusion of newer organizers who brought a greater focus on relationship building to the group. The case was revised to represent this more contextualized—and more accurate—critique. Meanwhile, P&JU realized that they had strayed from a key principle of their organizing; the group decided to rebalance and be more intentional to structure political education back into a more central place in their work.

In an earlier study of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) organizing in Texas (Warren, 2001), I reported on the Fort Worth affiliate's effort to build a multiracial organization across African American, Latino, and White congregations and members. The city experienced a racist hate killing and the White murderer was let off with probation. The Black community erupted in protest but the IAF group did not participate in the protest. Black members of the group told me how upset they were about this failure to act and how it represented the lack of a deep appreciation for the African American experience among non-Black members of the organization. White members (including the lead organizer) had a different view: Their organization was not designed to organize quick protests, focusing instead on long-term campaigns to address injustices. I engaged in countless discussions and revisions of the account before it was published in the book. I reported the varying perspectives, but I concluded that the incident portrayed the lack of depth in unity underlying the multiracial relationships in the group—a view that some White participants continued to reject. I went on to discuss how the larger IAF network worked much harder after that incident to challenge White members on issues of race.

Rigor and Positionality

To do community-engaged research, we need to be able to bring our whole selves to the project—our personal experiences, values, and standpoints.

Only in this way can we build deep relationships with folks in the community. They want to know where we are coming from not abstractly but in the concrete experiences of our lives. They want to know “our story” if they are going to trust us with “their story.” It can also be very important if we expect people who are quite different from ourselves to open up and share their stories honestly with us—in other words, to collect rich and accurate data. In the Harvard project, we asked student researchers to write memos reflecting on the experiences and values that brought them to the project and to interrogate their positionality in relation to the research.

This all sounds good on paper but has to be negotiated and figured out in practice. In Denver, Latino students in P&JU had been organizing to improve education at North High School. The school had historically served Denver’s Latino community, but with its 38% drop-out rate had become a potent symbol of educational failure. P&JU youth leaders had conducted a survey that revealed that many Latino students felt that teachers did not respect them. P&JU saw this as part of the long-term history of racism toward Latinos that had kept them poor and disempowered. The group organized a campaign to push for change, which eventually led to a reform committee consisting of teachers, administrators, P&JU organizers, and some students. After a promising start, however, P&JU felt that progress had stalled. They eventually called for a formal reform process that would involve all teachers having to reapply for their jobs; the superintendent of schools agreed and issued the ruling. When the team interviewed the head of the teacher’s union, she was trenchant in her criticism of P&JU on this issue.

What was the Denver team to make of this? They sympathized with the students but had different perspectives among themselves on the issue. One student had been a teacher prior to her doctoral studies and worried that the school had not been given enough time to change. Another student, himself an African American man, had been a teacher but also a youth organizer and identified with the frustrations of the young Latinos. When the team reported back to the entire project, heated discussion continued across all members. I was a parent with children in an urban district frustrated with the racism my children and others experienced and was sympathetic to P&JU students. Others were concerned about a growing movement to undermine teachers unions. We discussed our various standpoints openly and in relation to the case. We reminded ourselves of the purpose of the research—to describe and analyze how P&JU organized and why. In the end, we agreed that we did not have to take a position on the issue. We were telling the story from the perspective of P&JU, focused on explaining the group’s organizing processes. However, to be fair, we did have an obligation to report the opposing point of view from the teachers and we did so.

Negotiating Relationships and Living With Tension

There are many tensions in negotiating collaborative relationships. The most fundamental, I think, concerns management of public image. We have a responsibility to the research community and to the broader public to make a fair and balanced analysis of the group's work. Yet the group's self-interest in our project often lies in the publicity we give it. On some level, "all publicity is good publicity." Nevertheless, if we expose limitations and weaknesses, it might possibly lessen the support they will receive or even give ammunition to the group's enemies. I suppose there is a limiting case where we might discover something so damaging to the organizing group that including it in our published writings would do real harm.

I do not believe these tensions can always be resolved. Scholars are not the same as organizers and do not have the same roles, purposes, and interests. Sometimes, thorough discussion can lead to agreement and consensus on an analysis or interpretation of organizing work. However, we may not always be able to agree. Like many organizers, I think the tension itself can often be a good thing. It can push scholars to deeper and more complex understanding as it did with my IAF and Denver cases; it might push organizers to improve practice as it did in both these cases too.

I have learned that long-term relationship is essential for resolving or living with tensions. I have found that organizers respond when they see that you are in the relationship for the long run, not just to get the data, publish, and run. The IAF organizers appreciated my willingness to stay engaged with them and, as a result, were willing to accept our differences. The trust and relationships we had built with P&JU also mattered greatly to our ability to reach some consensus.

A long-term relationship provides opportunities for each side to benefit over time in many reciprocal ways. I believe this collaborative approach creates better scholarship. I also believe it creates more relevant scholarship as it is more closely attuned to practical struggles for social justice.

Collaborative Research in Boston's Youth Justice Movement—Luke Aubry Kupscznk

Between 2005 and 2008, Boston students and their adult supporters in youth organizing groups joined in a citywide alliance to demand jobs for young people as a way to prevent violence in their neighborhoods. They took measures that included turning their backs on city councilors at a city council meeting and staging a "die-in" on the steps of City Hall. Through these efforts, they won significant increases in city and state funding for youth

jobs. Adult staff members at some of these organizations believe this period is a strong example of the exertion of power by youth and that it helped spur even greater levels of collaboration across youth and adult allies in Boston that continue today.

In what follows, I describe the development and process of conducting a collaborative research project between researchers at the University of Massachusetts in Boston and three of these youth organizations about this high point of the youth justice movement in Boston. I contend that the collaborative nature of this project not only aided in the development of rich research questions and the facilitation of interviews but also added to the rigor applied in analyzing and delivering our findings.

Project Background

During the 2013-2014 academic year, I served as the teaching fellow for a course called The Practicum in Community-Based Research at the University of Massachusetts Boston led by Mark Warren. The Practicum is designed to offer apprenticeship training to PhD students in community-based, collaborative research. Our partner organizations included three youth organizing groups in the Boston area: the Boston-area Youth Organizing Project (BYOP), the City School, and the Roxbury Environmental Empowerment Project (REEP), a youth-led program of Alternatives for Community and Environment (ACE).

In pursuing a collaborative relationship, we recognized a set of unique challenges as well as possible strengths. Challenges included developing trust between the researchers and our organizational partners as well as determining common goals and methods. Strengths included intimate access to the world of youth organizing.

Designing the Research

While our research team brainstormed possible areas of research at the start of the year, we waited to develop the focus of our study, and the corresponding research questions, collaboratively with REEP, BYOP, and the City School. We began to meet with the adult staff of these organizations: Najma Naz'yat of BYOP, Dave Jenkins of REEP, and Seth Kirshenbaum of the City School. We used these early meetings to discuss, draft, and sign a memorandum of understanding that expressed the obligations of both researchers and organization staff. We viewed this as a vital step in building trust as well as recognizing the potential biases and perspectives of both sides.

These early meetings were chaotic and difficult to keep focused on developing research questions. Najma, Dave, and Seth all have deep passion for the work that they do and they develop ideas faster than they can communicate them. As a research team, we tried to follow the multitude of suggestions, questions, ideas, and recollections that bounced around at these meetings. While our partners were not academics or researchers in an official capacity, they recognized and respected our standards of rigor and objectivity and realized that we would need to focus the project if we were going to be able to study an issue systematically and in depth. Eventually, we settled on a set of possible research scenarios and questions.

Our partners were particularly interested in understanding what created the “magic” of the campaign for youth jobs during the 2005-2008 period. They felt that an especially strong group of youth leaders had brought organizations together and inspired a united and successful campaign to create jobs and curb violence in the city. Our partners wanted to learn lessons from the period’s successes to apply them to the present. Working together with our partners, we honed a set of research questions to meet these goals. We then developed an interview guide that was shared with our partners who provided very useful feedback.

We also collaboratively developed a research plan. Each organization selected 10 youth leaders who had been active during our period of study. Najma, Dave, and Seth contacted these alumni, as well as some key staff at other organizations, and arranged interviews with members of our team. Without this identification and facilitation of interviews, we would never have managed to schedule all of the interviews we did, much less gain the trust of participants.

We also made sure to interview people with contrasting points of view. For example, some youth organizing groups disagreed on what it means for an organization to be “youth-led.” Our partner organizations held a firm belief that youth should be the key decision-makers, while adults played a support role. However, we intentionally interviewed staff at organizations that disagreed—staff who believed adults should step in if a decision youth made endangered the larger purpose of the movement. In addition, members of our own research team often disagreed on this issue and we had to work to understand one another’s perspective.

Drafting Findings

Throughout the research process, our team met on a weekly basis to code and analyze data, discuss findings, and reflect on interviews. A spirit of collaboration imbued not only our relationship with our partner organizations but also

with one another. Ultimately we had far more data than we could analyze within the yearlong span of our class. Consequently, we decided to focus on three of our initial research questions: How did youth justice groups and individuals come together to form a unified movement? How was youth power and leadership practiced and viewed at the time? What impacts did participation in the movement have on young people? In pairs of two, we drafted sections of the report that corresponded to these questions.

To get feedback on our draft, and to check its accuracy and usefulness, we helped organize an alumni reunion event. We invited all of the participants, our organizational partners, and other members of the community to come and share dinner with us. Afterward, we presented our findings and broke up into focus groups to discuss them. These focus groups helped us to refine our findings in important ways. For example, one alumnus felt that we had inappropriately downplayed the roles of race and class in youth organizing. Consequently, we revised the draft to stress the significance of low-income youth of color, who normally feel they have no voice, speaking up and leading a movement that won millions of dollars in funding for youth jobs.

Countering Marginalization

Throughout the research process, we have consistently asked for feedback and checked for accuracy with our partners and participants in the community. This practice has led to a more rigorous research process. It has produced a database and report of knowledge about youth power that would have otherwise never come to light. Without the reunion event, we would not have emphasized the role of race and class in youth organizing, and highlight what it means for low-income youth of color who are normally silenced to exert voice and power in the political arena. In sum, just as youth organizers are challenging “traditional” power dynamics between youth and adults in the city, our challenges to the more “traditional” researcher–community relationship sought to prevent the marginalization of the community best served by our findings.

Community-Based Participatory Research and Action—José Calderon

The concept of advocacy can have many meanings. For some, it can mean the researcher coming from the outside and using research as a means of advocating for a particular group or population. This can be a disempowering form of research. Another form is one where the scholar works alongside community participants in carrying out research around issues, needs, or

problems that are pertinent to the community. In this method of research, the community participants have a voice in the research, in diagnosing and defining the problem, in carrying out research on the problem, in analyzing the outcomes of the research, and in using the research to present and implement solutions. The latter is the type of research that I attempt to carry out in my work. In much of my research, I ground theory in data collected through participant observation and interviewing, and develop my analysis through the writing and coding of field notes and interview transcripts. My work, however, has not entirely followed the grounded-theory approach, because I have been more than a participant observer in the process. My involvement as a leader in various community, neighborhood, and civic groups has made it impossible for me to be a neutral observer. Gathering data in the dual roles of researcher and activist, however, has provided special insight into activities and trends in the community.

In this type of research, there is a reciprocal process where the researchers and community participants learn about each other and the history, culture, and foundations of the community in which they are both participating. The research is also seen as an avenue for taking research outcomes and using them to implement strategies that can address the issues that the community is facing. This includes a practice where, rather than “expert” solutions being predefined, the results of the research are interpreted and used as guides for action and advancing social change.

For example, I teach at Pitzer College and work with community activists in Pomona, California, a majority Latino and African American city, where a bill, Measure T, was placed on the city’s ballot to replace the elections of city councilmembers by district to at-large elections. Together with Pitzer students, including Jared Calvert and Kathy Cabrera, I worked with councilmember Cristina Carrizosa and other community members to carry out research on the measure and the history of voting rights in the city. The research revealed that Measure T was a sinister attempt by conservative forces, including the police, to turn back the will of the people in Pomona who, back in 1990 (after law suits by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund and the Southwest Voter Registration Project), voted to scrap citywide elections in favor of single-member districts to bolster minority representation. After the research exposed that the police association had given \$50,000 to efforts to support the passage of this bill and that they were affiliated with a leaflet depicting a White hand extended upward over Brown hands reaching from below, a multiracial coalition of community members and organizations held a press conference, walked door to door, and on election day defeated Measure T and helped elect two supportive councilmembers.

An essential component of this style of learning and research is a commitment to promoting an equal relationship between the interests of the academics and the community participants. Traditionally, academics have had a tendency to “parachute” into a community or workplace for their own research or funding interests without developing the kind of long-term relationship and form of collaboration that it takes to create concrete change. In working to move beyond traditional research models, participating students and faculty collaborate to create what Kenneth Reardon (1998) has described as “social learning processes that can develop the organizational, analytical, and communication skills of local leaders and their community-based organizations” (p. 59).

I have learned that it is essential for faculty members to make a long-term commitment to the sites and communities where they are situated or where they have placed their students. Although students can only commit for a semester or until graduation, faculty participants are in a better position to sustain campus–community partnerships. As these long-term partnerships are developed, students and faculty can become an influential force in their communities. They no longer are placed in the role of travelers passing by. Instead, they see themselves as participants with a stake in the decisions being made.

As research efforts are used to create and change policies, the divide between campus and community is being diminished. Our communities do not see the campus as an island, and, more important, we don’t see ourselves as an island. We see ourselves as an appendage of a larger community.

The participants in the many coalitions and organizations that I have been involved with have not been as concerned with bias in research but more concerned with finding solutions to the many problems that they confront in the community and in the schools. I have been considered an “insider” by these organizations and coalitions, as I usually carry out research in communities where my family lives or where I have established a long-term foundation. By working actively in these organizations and coalitions, I am able to develop an ongoing dialogue with the participants who allow me to serve as both an active participant and researcher. In this dialogue, we not only engage in analysis and reflection but also challenge each other and begin to develop theories and strategies for dealing with the emerging problems they are facing. In my view, these theories are important but mainly when they lead to strategies for change.

As in the Measure T example, a problem was identified that led to research on the forces behind a movement to turn at-large elections back to single districts. As a result of the research, the community participants theorized that the real intent of the measure was to curtail the increasing power of the growing

Latino community and to defeat councilmembers who opposed traffic checkpoints and defended the rights of immigrants. A plan was implemented to hold a press conference, expose the measure as an attack on voting rights, and get the vote out to defeat the measure. The outcome resulted in a defeat of Measure T and a continued voter movement that also elected councilmembers who were more supportive of immigrant rights.

My entry point comes from my activist background. Coming from this background, I work hard to support students who get involved with community leaders and other participants in finding solutions to practical problems in their communities. There are many students coming out of high school these days who have a history of community involvement. The higher education experience can put a damper on their passion. Some of these students have a tendency to turn away from the academy and drop out. I think community-based participatory action and research can make a real difference for these students. I know that it makes a difference for faculty who have come out of an activist history and are trying to find a means to exist in academia without being co-opted and without losing the values that give social meaning to their research or teaching.

Time and time again, I have found that being involved as an organizer alongside the community participants allows me to develop a trust that I would not normally develop as a neutral researcher. In the Measure T example, I had already developed a trust with community members and some councilmembers as a result of being an activist in previous community struggles. This trust allowed for using the research on the origins of district elections in the city as a foundation for developing a plan of action and its implementation.

I combine critical pedagogy, participatory action research, and community engagement as a means of bringing students and faculty together with community-based organizations to work on common issues and to effect social change. These collaborative efforts are examples of policy-making models that go beyond charity and dependence on experts to “get at the root causes of problems, and focus directly or indirectly on politically empowering the powerless” (Morton, 1995, p. 23). The research and learning described here focus on the sources of inequality and what can be done about it. The dominant understanding of inequality tends to blame individuals for their inadequacies. Instead, the practices described here focus on the historical and systemic foundations of inequality and challenge students and faculty to find common ground with community institutions, unions, organizations, and neighborhood leaders to arouse social consciousness and long-term structural change.

Discussion

The above cases demonstrate many ways in which CCES is rigorous and, in fact, sometimes more rigorous than traditional scholarship. First, conducting

this kind of research requires making explicit personal biases and standpoints and considering their influence on the research process. When Celina Su's community partners demanded a clear explanation for the value of her proposed research to justify the time they would spend on it, she had to articulate potential biases and assumptions in the research early on. The efforts of Mark Warren's team to build relationships with community participants required that researchers interrogate their personal experiences and values so that they can "tell their story" to the partners. This process helps to clarify the influence of those experiences and values on the research project and in some ways make it more objective; Charles Hale (2008, p. 11) has called this *positioned objectivity*.

Second, participant contributions often strengthen research design and methods up front. The input from Su's partners helped create a survey for a participatory budgeting process that was more likely to be filled out and include useful information—from undocumented immigrants, for example. Luke Kupscznk's partners shaped the research focus and interview protocols for youth leaders in ways that helped reveal their deeper experiences.

Third, community-based research involves forms of accountability and validity tests to research findings that go beyond peer-review. Warren's community participants questioned him sharply when he shared some initial findings on race relations and that process pushed him to develop more nuanced and complex analyses of interracial unity in organizing processes. Luke Kupscznk's partners insisted on the importance of race and class analysis in youth leadership. Gregory Squires learned that the targets of community-based action bring an additional level of accountability beyond what occurs in typical peer-review processes. When the target of research is a powerful organization, like the insurance company in Squires's American Family expert report, it has the resources to hire its own researchers and mount a media campaign to attempt to discredit its opponents. This threat pushes collaborative researchers to be even more careful about the rigor of their research.

Fourth, collaborative research creates the kind of relationships and trust necessary for valid ethnographic research. Luke Kupscznk's case reveals the step-by-step manner in which researchers on youth organizing engaged with organizers in the design, conduct, and products of the research. This partnership process led to access and trust with young people to be interviewed by the research team so they were willing to open up and tell their stories to university-based researchers.

Moreover, previous relationships of trust often facilitate collaborations in the first place. In the American Family case, the fact that the attorneys had long worked with civil rights groups in Milwaukee on other issues (e.g.,

school desegregation) helped them come together more easily on the insurance case. José Calderón's case also speaks to the value of creating and sustaining long-term relationships of trust capable of producing multiple research-action collaborations.

In the end, CCES approaches can sometimes lead to knowledge that would be overlooked in traditional scholarship. Community activists are often the first to identify critical issues of inequality and oppression because they experience them directly. The results of Squires's research contributed to a larger knowledge base on insurance redlining, which supported subsequent legal actions. While, redlining by home insurance companies was not entirely a secret, little attention was paid to this issue by academics before community organizations made this a public policy issue. Research about this form of redlining developed not out of academic, disciplinary interest but as a result of the demands of community activists to which collaborative, equity-oriented researchers responded. Similarly, Kupscznk and his colleagues would not have identified and studied how youth activism in Boston led to large increases in spending on youth jobs and reductions in violence if community partners with local, contextual knowledge had not raised the issue. Calderón's community partners were concerned with growing attacks on Latino immigrants and called for research and action on Measure T and the suppression of Latino voting rights.

Despite the potential advantages of CCES both for knowledge production and action, tensions can arise in these university–community partnerships. One challenge arises from the different priorities and trainings of organizers—focused on action—versus scholars—focused on research. In Kupscznk's case, researchers faced many challenges in working with community partners to focus research questions. These activists had a deep passion for their work and they “develop ideas faster than they can communicate them.” Many meetings and iterations were required to create a focused research design that would be rigorous.

Perhaps more fundamentally, community activists have their primary accountability to advancing the interests of their constituencies. Scholars have a responsibility to a wider audience, building knowledge in the academic disciplines and in the public sphere. Community organizations are also interested in self-reflection and exploring tensions in their work to learn from them to advance their own practice and to contribute lessons to a larger organizing world. But sometimes, there is tension between short-term and long-term interests. Warren, in particular, faced some of the tensions that can occur when his responsibility to produce independent scholarship clashed with the immediate needs of community participants. Warren revealed weaknesses when community organizations wanted to emphasize strengths at that time.

Throughout the above cases, we learn about the importance of building relationships of trust and mutual respect. These relationships are the foundation for conducting CCES. Even if the tensions identified above can never be fully resolved, it appears that strong, mutually respectful, and long-lasting relationships can create the context for mitigating tensions and allowing both knowledge and action to proceed.

Conclusion

CCES represents a partnership between researchers and community change agents designed to create knowledge that helps to advance social justice. In that sense, it is decidedly not neutral. It critiques systems of inequality and injustice and plays a role in advocacy efforts to advance social change. The best interests of these advocacy efforts lie in conducting rigorous, systematic research that stands the test of critique from experts representing multiple perspectives in the academy and in the community. Many kinds of tensions can arise in these collaborations, including when short-term organizational interests conflict with the long-term needs of the broader social justice movement. In the end, the relationships created through CCES create the space through which to address inevitable tensions and build a larger movement for social justice. It is this larger movement that is the ultimate goal of CCES.

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