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The Community Development Context of Research



Learning From Pandora

You may have seen the 2009 feature film *Avatar*,¹ about a man with a disability, an indigenous community, and a corporation that will kill for profit. The film takes place on the moon Pandora, rich in the rare mineral unobtainium. With an atmosphere inhospitable to humans, some of the company employees work through living avatars built from the genetic structure of the indigenous population. The indigenous population, the Na'vi, sit smack-dab on top of an unobtainium mother lode. The corporation wants them to move and has offered all kinds of goodies to entice them away, especially including things like “education” that will help them “develop” to become like humans. Because he stumbled into a trusting relationship with the Na'vi, employee Jake Sully, disabled below the waist in his human body but fully able in his Na'vi avatar, is enlisted to become a participant-observation researcher to learn what, if anything, will get the Na'vi to move.

Avatar clearly has a point of view on the weaknesses of Western development philosophy and its lack of sustainability, and there is certainly no lack of historical examples for the film to draw on. The Western world's historical penchant to impose colonizing cultural definitions on indigenous peoples well into the mid-20th century,² and continuing demands for unsustainable mass consumption, make suspect any claims that we have become more enlightened. But alternative impulses are also breaking through to the surface more and more. The increasing popularity of higher education community engagement, bringing with it forms of participatory action research and student service learning, is propelled by those alternative impulses.

But those of us academics who are trying to engage ourselves and our students with local communities are often as internally conflicted as Dr. Grace Augustine, the scientist in *Avatar* whose mixed motives left her struggling to understand that her research, unaccountable to the community from which she extracted her data, could be used to destroy that community. She, in many ways, embodies the conflicting impulses that make it so difficult to do participatory action forms of research. The movie then compels us to place our hopes in Sully, who "goes native" as he increasingly identifies with the Na'vi and their struggles to survive. Our real-world attempts to combine community needs with academic research face a similar tension. Even with all that has been written about higher education engagement with communities, all those volunteer hours, and all those participatory research studies, we can't show much real impact.³ Our planet's diversity of flora, fauna, culture, and language continues to decline, threatened by the same forces as Pandora. And perhaps it is because we researchers choose to remain wedded to our own narrow-minded pursuit of knowledge rather than "go native" and commit our allegiance to sustainable justice.

But can those of us whose privilege places us outside of communities struggling against oppression, exploitation, and exclusion actually go native? Or are we inexorably stuck with our privilege and its disabling effects on our ability to truly share understanding of the experiences of those lacking such privileges? Can we "help"? To understand, let's take a slightly deeper look at *Avatar*. Let's say for a moment that Pandora is a real place, the Na'vi are a real people, and the film is an attempt to tell a real history. Does the history seem to have been constructed following the principles of participation outlined in the previous chapter? Or does it seem to be a telling of a story from the point of view of an outsider interpreting the history through the outsider's eyes? How might the story be told differently if it were the Na'vi telling it from their standpoint and for their purposes? And what would the role of the researcher in such a case be?

If you are like me, your answer is "I have no idea." For we learn very little about the Na'vi in the film. We don't learn what their cherished values are, what their challenges are (other than having to deal with a bunch of stupid humans of course), or what their most valued successes are. And this has been the typical pattern of outsider professionals in dealing with populations that exist at the margins of "our" society. We interpret people as impoverished and unhappy because they don't have big-screen TVs, or interpret them as more moral and happy because they are living in the woods even when they are dying young from diabetes and heart disease. So we go in to "fix" them, from our standards and through our own eyes. We apply the golden rule—do unto others as you would have them do unto you—without considering that the "others" may not be like us, and doing unto them the same as us could in fact be doing harm.⁴

Perhaps the most important thing we are missing is the knowledge of how to connect our intellectual work with community change processes. While terms like *service learning* and *community-based participatory research* are widely discussed among scholars, the term

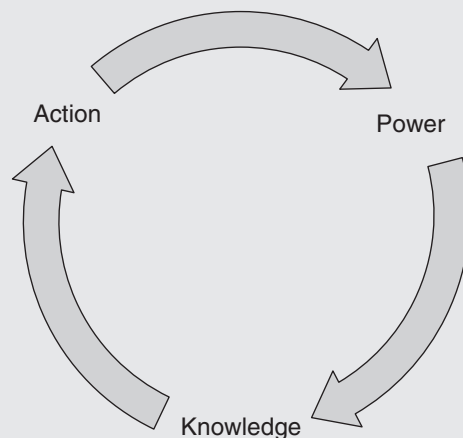
community development is barely acknowledged. Indeed, the very foundation for understanding community change is barely known among all these researchers and students who are trying to “partner” with communities around the world.⁵ This chapter is designed to bring the concept of community development into our understanding of participatory action research and better prepare us to do research that consciously and strategically supports community development toward a sustainable justice.

What Is Community Development?

Community development is such a varied practice that it is difficult to establish either a single history or approach. It is practiced around the world, in both the global north and the global south. It can be practiced as a generalized approach, as it often is in the third world, that includes the empowerment of community members, the creation of basic infrastructures like water and electricity, and the development of housing and commerce.⁶ Or it can be practiced as a highly specialized approach, as it often is in the United States, where a nonprofit community development corporation, or CDC, may focus only on rehabilitating housing in one neighborhood, while another CDC concentrates on small-business development in another neighborhood.⁷ Some community development is practiced as top-down elite-controlled service provision in poor communities, while other community development focuses much more on building the capacity of community residents to define their own issues, gather the resources to address those issues, and go to work on solving them.⁸ This latter form of community development also brings in the practice of *community organizing*.

It is on this latter philosophy of community development that I will build, as it fits the best with participatory action forms of research. Remember the power/knowledge/action cycle from the last chapter? That is where we start with a fully fleshed out grassroots community

Figure 3.1



development model. At the end of an effective community development process, the community will have more knowledge to engage in more effective action to have more power.

But how does this happen? Doing community development requires thinking of the community as a system. Communities, even small narrowly defined ones like a local professional community of practice, have their own power dynamics, factions, and personalities. Those of us working with any community need to understand those dynamics, or we may end up making the situation worse. Our work might, for example, help to reinforce the power of an anti-democratic leader, or it might worsen conflict between rival community factions. This is where the pre-research process, discussed in the previous chapter, comes in.

It is also important to understand that community development is not simply about building things. Safe drinking water, schools, houses, and other physical things are of course important. But even more important is building the capacity of the community members to organize themselves so that they can set and achieve their own community goals. In other words, it is about both building the house and building the capacity of the people to build the house and control it. I recently traveled with a group of community development workers to an isolated highlands farming community in central Mexico. The town's cathedral had seen its roof partially cave in some time ago and was patched with corrugated tin sheets that allowed rain to run down the walls and turn them green with fungus. From what I could tell, the remaining roof beams were in danger of collapsing at any time. The water supply was pumped from a nearby lagoon through a badly leaking two-inch pipe, attached to some homes with nothing more than a garden hose. At some point, a community development group had come through and built the town a baseball diamond and basketball court that had long since been ignored. Waist-high weeds grew up through the concrete of the basketball court, and the ball diamond had been "converted" to pasture for the farmers' mules. Whoever had been there before had only built things, not capacity.

But this group of community development workers, paid by the state government, was different. They did have their own agenda—to protect the threatened jaguar population in the region. But they were not there to impose or even manipulate a protection plan on the community. Instead, for two days, they engaged 30 or so community members in a participatory education project, asking community members basically to describe their ecosystem to each other and how community farming and other activities were affecting the regional ecosystem. It became quite clear through the process that the local community members were quite knowledgeable about the local ecosystem and clearly understood how their own human activities could impact the ecosystem and then, in turn, their own human community. Even the children, who were part of this process, showed their own unique understanding of ecosystem issues in their community. It was the children, in fact, who brought up the issue of garbage in the community, which was not systematically managed. As they spoke of the smell and ugliness of the strewn garbage you could see the adults, who had grown resigned to living in such circumstances, suddenly notice something that had fallen into the background of their lives. By the end of the two days, a little bit of capacity had been built, and over the next few years the community development workers will return to the community to facilitate the community planning and action process, collaboratively building a power/knowledge/action cycle that will support the community to grow its own capacities to protect the jaguar and develop the community in the residents' image.

It is probably becoming clear at this point that building community capacity requires much more expertise than is available from just an academic researcher and/or a group of students doing a community-based research or service learning project.⁹ Organizing meetings, developing strategies, managing voluntary labor, engaging local knowledge, and the like is far beyond the skill set of most academics. It requires a special set of sophisticated skills that have become devalued in academic life. Those skills are most embodied in the community worker. Sometimes this is a person with a specialized degree in community development or some related field like community psychology or social work. But more often it is a skilled community organizer, trained and apprenticed through one of the national community organizing networks or training centers. The community worker brings special skills in listening to what community members really care about, getting them to meetings to build their collective knowledge and develop an effective plan, and then supporting them to put their plan into action. The most famous community organizer in the history of this country is Saul Alinsky,¹⁰ who is credited with establishing the field. Less recognized, though just as influential, is Ella Baker,¹¹ who facilitated much of the community organizing strategy for the civil rights movement. They have produced models and best practices that are still being drawn upon today.¹²

Separate from the community organizer is the community leader. Community organizers are technical assistance experts. They know how to get people to meetings, organize them for action, negotiate with power holders for policy changes, and use the other skills required for effective community change. But because they are technical assistance experts, they often come from outside of the community, and that means they don't know the community or its issues through life experience. In addition, if they are going to build real power in the community, then they can't also be a leader but need to build the leadership capacity of the community members themselves. Good community organizers are also adept at identifying and building effective leaders who have the support of community residents and can expand the number of leaders in the community. So leaders are actual members of the community. And some of the best leaders are also *organic intellectuals*¹³—individuals who can understand and interpret from an insider's perspective both the "what" and the "why" of community members' experiences.

Every community organizing process, if it is to effectively grow the community's power/knowledge/action potential, must have people occupying the roles of leader and organizer. Those roles are rarely, if ever, effectively occupied by a professional researcher. And their power is underestimated by researchers. I still remember a conversation I had with a frustrated professor in a small, rural private liberal arts college. He had painstakingly collected water samples from around his county showing toxins dumped there by poorly regulated local industries. He'd taken his results to local public officials, but nothing had been done. When I asked him if he had talked with regional environmental groups, or organized meetings of residents, he returned a puzzled gaze, as if such actions should be superfluous in light of the evidence he had collected. His reaction is symptomatic of the misunderstanding by researchers that they alone can change the world. His research, of course, is invaluable. But it is only useful in the hands of an organized group of grassroots people who know how to organize their power and act on issues. A simple test for a researcher to determine if he or she needs an organizer is whether the researcher can get 100 community members to attend a meeting about his or her research and then can get each person to volunteer to put the research into use. If so, then the researcher already is an organizer. If not, then an organizer is needed.

The *organized group* is the most important outcome of any community organizing process. The goal of any truly powerful community organizing process is not to just identify and mobilize leaders to win on a specific issue. It is to build and maintain the community's power. And that requires keeping the community organized to address each issue as it arises and maintain a public presence through a recognized community organization. It is the enduring community organization that expresses the power in the power/knowledge/action cycle. But, historically, very few community organizations are able to sustain themselves beyond the five-year threshold, and, consequently, very few communities are able to sustain their power beyond this same threshold.

With community organizers and leaders in place, we can then start talking about the research and education roles that academics can play. As organizers support leaders to bring the community together to focus issues, develop strategies, and move into action on community development goals, they will begin to identify a variety of knowledge needs. It is at that point that the researcher becomes relevant.

Research and Community Development

If community development is about building the capacities of communities to solve their own problems, then how do we conduct research to support community development? The rest of the book will address the practical side of this question, looking at the kinds of research and their connections to stages of the community development process. In the remainder of this chapter we will address the *process* side of the question. In other words, we will look at how to conduct research so that it is consistent with a capacity-building community development approach.

Let's briefly return to Pandora and the challenge of supporting the voice of the Na'vi directly, rather than serving as a distorting filter for it. If we extrapolate from the existing fiction that the Na'vi are like indigenous peoples on Earth, then the starting point is their way of knowing, or knowledge system. Think back to the Navajo way of knowing in the previous chapter that helped uncover the hantavirus. Sidney Stephens, writing for the Alaska Native Knowledge Network, describes traditional native knowledge as emphasizing holistic understanding, a respect for all things, a trust in inherited wisdom communicated through story, local practical verification and application, and an integration of physical, metaphysical, and morality-based ways of thinking.¹⁴ Respecting the great variation among indigenous nations on the planet, such a characterization will not fit any group perfectly. But it provides a starting point for us to consider the work of research in any community setting. All community issues occur in the context of a holistic system, and the only way to intervene in them is to understand that system. Many if not all of the issues that communities face come from someone's lack of respect for either the planet or their fellow human being, which is where the reintegration of the physical and the moral comes in. And inherited wisdom, it is important to understand, is different from knowledge. We may be able to improve on the knowledge handed down to us, especially as changed circumstances require adapted knowledge. But wisdom is about deeper and more enduring understandings than a focus on simple cause-and-effect relationships allows. And the practical application is always the true test of knowledge.

Community needs and issues, then, can't be understood outside of this framework. But that doesn't mean that those of us outside of a community can't engage the community with new ideas. It just means that the ideas for addressing community needs and issues must build organically from a community process that can judge, filter, and integrate ideas coming in from the outside. Thus, solving problems is really about organizing local knowledge processes rather than simply forcing square academic information into a round community issue. And that can be quite unbalancing for those of us trained in Western higher education to think of ourselves as smarter than people not trained that way and to disregard local experience in favor of abstract academic assertions.

How does one get rebalanced? My starting point for thinking about how to do research supporting community development comes from the principles of good practice outlined by the Community Development Society International.¹⁵ Now, these principles were created for professionals who were engaged in actual development work. But they apply equally well to those of us who want our research to support community development outcomes. So what does the participatory action research process look like when it is guided by these principles?

Community Development Society International: Principles of Good Practice

- Promote active and representative participation toward enabling all community members to meaningfully influence the decisions that affect their lives
- Engage community members in learning about and understanding community issues and the economic, social, environmental, political, psychological, and other impacts associated with alternative courses of action
- Incorporate the diverse interests and cultures of the community in the community development process and disengage from support of any effort that is likely to adversely affect the disadvantaged members of a community
- Work actively to enhance the leadership capacity of community members, leaders, and groups within the community
- Be open to using the full range of action strategies to work toward the long-term sustainability and well-being of the community

Because the good practices make for very long subheadings, I will rephrase them:

- Organize community members to have power over their own lives
- Facilitate community members to choose issues and develop action plans
- Prevent exclusion and promote diversity of participation
- Build and expand local leadership
- Support the action necessary to achieve community goals

1. Organize Community Members to Have Power Over Their Own Lives

If a research process is going to help community members have power over their own lives, the research needs to focus on the issues in their lives that they want to control and practice the philosophy in the research process. In other words, community members need to have control over the research process itself. Community Voices Heard (CVH), a low-income grassroots membership organization in New York City, has been organizing around the preservation and governance of public housing in New York City since 2006. CVH has to rely on its members to do much of the work of the organization, including the research. So when they took on the city's public housing authority, they did it by engaging public housing residents. Through surveys and focus groups they not only gathered data, but they gathered new members to become involved in the struggle for resident participation in the governance of public housing.¹⁶

2. Facilitate Community Members to Choose Issues and Develop Action Plans

Remember that the most important form of participation is community members' participation in setting the agenda and choosing their own course of action. And that means being able to choose what issues are most important to them. The classic form of choosing the issue is when a community organizer starts knocking on doors to find out what residents care about and then organizes community meetings where residents prioritize issues that they want to volunteer their time for. But it also happens in other ways. I am currently working with a neighborhood group that has been organizing to resolve class and race tensions in their community. They have had amazing success at holding community suppers—bringing together sometimes over 100 residents on a regular basis to break bread and talk about the neighborhood. About a year ago, during one of the suppers, they asked residents what the most important issues were in the neighborhood. They decided that a dangerous intersection needed to be redesigned, and the local park needed upgrading. They won on both of those issues. This year they have a participatory action researcher—me—involved with them, and we talked about doing a more “sophisticated” needs assessment of neighborhood residents. But as I heard more about how they chose issues the last time, and how successful they were on the issues they chose, my more resource-intensive needs assessment method seemed to offer little advantage over what they already knew how to do.

3. Prevent Exclusion and Promote Diversity of Participation

A good research process can do much more than generate data. In the best cases it builds relationships, and in the very best cases it builds relationships across differences. Just like the community suppers get people talking across class and race differences, research can bring perspectives to community issues that people may otherwise dismiss. And the more you get

people involved in research they would otherwise dismiss, the less they can argue with the results. My friend Tim Mungavan, whom you met earlier, was once asked to work with a non-profit housing organization to help design publicly subsidized housing in a white working-class neighborhood in Minneapolis. He knew such housing would be a hard sell, to say the least, so he started by organizing a neighborhood meeting, inviting the residents to voice their objections. They were quite forthcoming—public housing would hurt property values, increase crime, and cause the neighborhood to deteriorate, they said. Then Tim challenged the residents to study whether those beliefs were actually true. There were a few who took him up on the offer, and as they did the research they found out that there were ways to build public housing that had none of the negative impacts the residents feared. Alas, the housing was never built in the end, but the research actually reduced the discriminatory attitudes of the residents who participated in it.

4. Build and Expand Local Leadership

Connecting the research process to an organizing process both builds residents' skills and their leadership capacity. Carrying out a research project involves a long-term commitment, a willingness to devote many hours to planning and design work, and then often a public speaking role when the results are presented. Those characteristics also describe the central features of leadership development. In addition, an effective research project can involve a large number of people, providing a wide range of leadership development opportunities. Many of the 100-plus residents in the Harlan County *Higher Ground* community theater project, depicting the traumatic effects of prescription drug abuse, had never acted before. But from that project a number of them moved on to much more public roles in the community around the issue.¹⁷

5. Support the Action Necessary to Achieve Community Goals

Choosing an effective action strategy is perhaps the most important knowledge question a community change effort confronts. Because, ultimately, community development is about achieving outcomes—better housing, better jobs, better access to health care, less discrimination, less violence, more justice. There is no research for research's sake in community development. And there is no community development for community development's sake. It is about designing the most effective strategy to achieve the community goals. The wrong strategy will not only fail to solve the issue but, in failing, could also cause the group itself to fail. So having enough knowledge to act effectively is the crucial part of the power/knowledge/action cycle. When the New England Grassroots Environment Fund became concerned about the privatization of water in their region, and the use of groundwater for bottled water corporations, they organized a research project to understand the extent of the problem. Most importantly, they also documented what strategies local communities were successfully using to battle back and protect community groundwater.¹⁸

Well-designed participatory action research, then, can go a long way toward supporting an empowering community development process. And you might have guessed, by this point, that developing a good design is dependent on developing good relationships between the researcher and the community.

Building Research Relationships in a Community Development Context

I am often asked by either community activists or academics how they can find a good partner. It can seem challenging for community activists and researchers to find each other. But it may be easier than we think. In many ways, it is easy for researchers to find potential partners. In urban areas, city governments often maintain directories of area nonprofits and community organizations, as do university social work departments. In rural areas, local newspapers often list meetings of area groups, and county governments can sometimes be good sources of contact information. Yes, it's a little time-consuming to search each other out, but a researcher wanting to work on housing issues can find possible organizations with just a small investment in web search time. For community groups, most universities maintain pretty good directories, and many have their own web search engine. In addition, an increasing number of campuses have some kind of service learning or other community outreach office. So it may take some web searching and a few phone calls, but finding out who on campus does housing research is possible. So when people ask me how they can find each other, what I think they really mean is how they can find someone they can trust. That's more challenging.

The work of developing communities, and bringing research in to support that work, as you may have surmised by now, rests on relationships. If, like me, you have ever feared imposing yourself on a community or organization, or felt like an interloper, it may be because you haven't really developed strong enough relationships. Particularly, we professional researchers often feel caught between thinking we know what's best for the community or not contributing our own perspective for fear of being too influential. Both responses, however, are symptomatic of not having built those relationships and consequently misunderstanding what collaboration and community-based expertise mean. I remember being brought up short a few years ago while working with an African American community in Toledo, Ohio. I was at a meeting, not contributing because I was stuck in the fear that my "grand academic wisdom" might unduly influence the community, when one of the neighborhood leaders asked me directly what I thought. We'd worked together for about a year by that time, and while I hemmed and hawed, Rose Newton, in her wonderfully confrontational way, said, "Just tell us what you think and don't worry about it—if it's a stupid idea we'll tell you."

One reason academics get stuck in this bind is they don't understand good community development process. I visit many colleges and universities to talk about participatory action research and service learning and get the chance to learn about a lot of projects. At one university I sat down with a couple of professors who had heard about a project in another city where at-risk youth from one racial/ethnic community interviewed elders from a different

racial/ethnic community and had built a community organization from their efforts. These two professors, who were neither youths nor elders, wanted to copy and paste the project to their own city. They had the design all put together and were preparing the grant proposal. But they hadn't even talked with the organization they expected to partner with. You can see the problem from a community development perspective—all the control and knowledge was in the hands of the professors, and the community was expected to provide the action. This is what we call an *initiator* model of participatory action research, as opposed to *consultant* or *collaborator* models.¹⁹ In an initiator project the academic initiates the project and tries to get community members to sign on to it. The problem with such a project is that, while community members may sign on, they rarely take ownership of it, and when the academic stops being involved, the project dies.²⁰ In many cases then, the initiator model of participatory action research is not participatory and results in no real action.

In contrast are *consultant* and *collaborator* models. In the consultant model, the researcher simply provides research desired by the community group. In this case the agenda power is completely in the hands of the community. The risk, however, is that community members may not always be fully aware of what they want from the research or how to effectively integrate research into their strategic action. This is especially the case for evaluation research, which we will cover in Chapter 8. I am contacted regularly by groups who are at the end of their grant-funding cycle and have to send an evaluation report to their funder. When I ask them how they will use the research, however, they admit that they won't use it. They simply need to send a report out. In some cases I can convince them that they can and should expect more from the research—to use it in planning their next round of activities or preparing new grant proposals—but in other cases they really are just looking for a consultant who can do a quick and dirty survey to satisfy the funder. I usually decline such requests, as they feel like an uncomfortable waste of resources. I am happiest when I am engaged as a collaborator, part of the process, leading in some parts and stepping back in others.

The implication here is that the researcher should not invite the community to participate in his or her research project but be invited to do research by the community and then collaborate with them with as much regard as he or she would show an academic colleague. And that is unnerving to most academics. For researchers have always been trained to invite others to participate in their research, and many can't even imagine how to get invited by others. Furthermore, most of us academics have a very narrow definition of our expertise. We consider ourselves substantive experts. So a criminologist, for example, might only consider doing projects involving crime and would see his or her role as providing expertise about crime. But I've been forced to rethink my own professional self-definition in the past few years, as I am increasingly invited to work with groups on issues about which I have no "substantive" expertise. One of the most enlightening participatory action research experiences I have ever had was when I was invited to become involved with a government-funded project to help people with developmental disabilities get jobs. I tried to explain that, while I knew there was a field called disability studies, I knew almost nothing about it. But the project team insisted that they wanted me for my participatory evaluation skills, not my substantive skills. They had the developmental disabilities expertise. They needed my research skills. It was humbling, as I probably learned more than anyone else involved in the project and was forced to reconsider my own

misconceptions about the spirit and talents of people with developmental disabilities who have clearly been too readily dismissed by our society.

So how do researchers get invited? Believe me, once a researcher gets a reputation for being able to listen and deliver, there will be no shortage of invitations. But for new researchers who want to build relationships with community groups, the most important thing to remember is to offer what the group wants, not what the researcher wants. Many of us researchers get involved with groups simply through volunteering with them. When we show up enough times, even if it's just to set up tables before the meeting or fold chairs after the meeting, we show that the group can count on us. I still routinely try to go early or stay late at community events that are part of the research, if only to convince myself that I can still do real work like set up tables or wash dishes.

And how do community groups make such invitations? I was recently at a gathering of community organizers who use the congregation-based community organizing model. In other words, they organize people through churches, synagogues, and mosques, rather than in neighborhoods. Community organizers in general are some of the most focused task masters I have encountered. You get only one chance to deliver with a community organizer, and if you screw up they'll never call you again. There was a panel of organizers telling about the research projects they had done with academics. I asked them how they decided which academics to approach for such research. As a group, they were not all that certain of the best method. But one organizer had decided that the best way to find a reliable academic was through nonacademic relationships. In one case he had found someone he had known as a fellow parishioner in his own church. I heard a similar story in the U.K., as a community organization director explained that she had better success recruiting research support through their neighborhood newsletter than by trying to make phone calls to strangers at the university.

The lesson is simple. Academics who want to be engaged with the community professionally need to first be engaged with the community personally. Not as researchers, but as human beings. They need to be out in the community, doing normal things that show they care about the community as a person, rather than just as a researcher. One of my graduate student advisees has volunteered with an area environmental organization as a learning circle facilitator. He did it only because he cared about the issues they were working on, expecting nothing from it for his career. After a couple of years, a new program on campus provided graduate assistantships to organize courses around community projects. He mentioned this to the group's leaders, and they sprang into action with ideas about what they could do with it, helping to write the proposal, and he got the assistantship.

Groups that do antiracism work talk about this as *ally work*.²¹ Ally work occurs when those of us who have unearned privileges based on class, race, gender, ability, and other characteristics choose to work in support of groups who do not. Such work means understanding our own privilege and working as an ally in support of others who take leadership in working on their own issues. Allies do not lead, they provide support as requested. And the emphasis in antiracism ally work is not so much on studying and "helping" the excluded as it is on studying one's self to unlearn our own internalized racism or other "isms." For those of us who have such unearned privilege, it can be challenging to understand that it is our support, not our leadership, that is most valued.

Aside from building personal relationships, there are some other considerations for both researchers and community groups to take into account in deciding whether to work together. So let's look at those from both the researcher side and the community side.

The Partner Perspective From the Researcher Side

When a researcher commits to a project he or she is making a commitment to a community. And that means that the researcher becomes responsible for understanding the community development context of the commitment. It is not enough to just shrug and walk away when a project fails. For when the project fails, it makes it even harder for the next attempt to succeed. Community organizers call this *burned turf*—when the community members feel like they have been burned by unfulfilled promises made by outsiders. They are then even more reluctant to believe the next outsider who says they can “help” the community. So it is important for researchers to ask some questions about a potential project in the hopes of ensuring its success. Researchers not only need to find an organization willing to accept help but one that has the capacity to guide that help and use the end product of the research. How can a researcher assess a potential community or organization partner before investing time and resources that may only lead to failure? Here are some questions to ask about the community/organization side of the equation.

Questions the Researcher Should Ask

- Does the community/organization have the capacity to participate?
- What resources can the community/organization contribute?
- Does the community/organization have research needs you can fulfill?

1. *Does the Community/Organization Have the Capacity to Participate?* If the research is going to actually be used, the community or organization needs to have the capacity to use it. In some cases it is possible to find out something about an organization's history before even meeting them, including things like the stability of the board and staff, its funding, and the kind of projects it has been responsible for. This doesn't mean that small, unstable organizations or disorganized communities should be avoided altogether. Indeed, a good participatory action research project can help build and stabilize a weak community or organization. But using research in this way takes special skill and effort, and, as we have seen, the researcher either needs to have good community organizing skills or needs to be working with a skilled community organizer. It is also okay to take a risk on a small project that may not lead to anything. There are those out there who compare developing a collaborative research relationship to dating. You can't know everything about your potential partner before taking some risks, so make the risks small at the beginning.

2. *What Resources Can the Community/Organization Contribute?* For those of us who do our participatory action research on the side, because our university values only research that produces journal articles, it is often difficult to do this kind of research pro bono. As forms of the participatory action research model become more popular, and we develop a better understanding of how to engage students in such research projects, the research resource gap is becoming less problematic. But there are still resources that must come from the community side. Depending on the project, community or organization members often need to make time for interviews, open their files, read drafts, provide office space and computer access for students, and even help with training and supervising students on occasion. They may also need to be responsible for organizing meetings around the research part of the project, identifying interviewees, and developing databases. One of the most difficult challenges I have faced is working with a community organization that is already going full out. I become responsible for contacting all the relevant community people to encourage them to participate in the research planning, finding a place to meet, and making the reminder phone calls. It is important to know at the beginning whether there are community staff resources or money available to support these research organizing tasks.

3. *Does the Community/Organization Have Research Needs You Can Fulfill?* As we have seen, it's not always crucial that the researcher have substantive expertise on the issue the community is tackling, but it is always a consideration. Many community organizations have a lot of expertise to begin with, and they are looking for advanced information. When the West Bank Community Development Corporation in Minneapolis wanted to develop their own community organizing program, they contacted me not just to do research, but to lead an education process so they could make informed choices about the kind of community organizing to do. In cases where the community or organization is entering uncharted waters, a researcher's substantive expertise may be as important as methodological expertise. Time, geography, and relationships are also considerations in determining whether you are the best person for an organization effort. Knowing how much time a project might take is crucial. In one recent project, we had one semester for a special graduate level seminar to complete 65 interviews, code and analyze them, write up the final report, and organize a community event to develop action plans from the research. We pulled it off, but it was right down to the wire. In other cases I facilitated projects that were four- to five-hour drives from my home, but those were with groups like the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood in Minneapolis with whom I already had a relationship. I've turned down other remote projects when I didn't know the group at all.

The Partner Perspective From the Community Side

Communities or organizations trying to fill a particular research need not only have to develop their own understanding of what they need, but they also may need to really hunt to find a researcher who can fill that need. When a researcher has the right skills, that researcher

may not be available for a year or more, and community organizations just don't have the luxury of planning for research a year in advance. Additionally, because time and resources are tight, it is important to find help that actually helps. There are still horror stories out there of researchers, or their students, who didn't follow through on a promised project, didn't complete it in time to do any good, or didn't do quality work. And if the community does not have their own research expert, it's difficult for them to judge someone who claims to be. It's also difficult to demand a résumé from people who are essentially volunteering themselves and their students for your cause—though you still should. So, what are the standards by which offers to help should be judged? There is a set of questions community members and workers, as well as academics themselves, can ask.

Questions the Community/Organization Should Ask

- Is the researcher willing to follow the community/organization's lead?
- How good is the researcher at meeting deadlines?
- Can the researcher communicate in a community context?
- What experience does the researcher have?

1. *Is the Researcher Willing to Follow the Community/Organization's Lead?* Any community organization being approached by a researcher should have a test ready. If you remember back to the beginning of Chapter 2, the first time I approached a community organization with my research question, as a graduate student, they instead asked me to clean their hallway storage space. Trying to be a good citizen, I accepted the task. I discovered that they were testing me not only to see if I could truly collaborate with them but also to see how far I would dig for the gold mine of data that space contained. So it is useful to invite the researcher for a casual meeting to discuss what kind of participation the community will have throughout the research process. Discuss whether the researcher plans to publish anything from the research and whether you will have any input in that writing. Discuss who owns the data. The "A" answer will be "the community/organization owns it." Some community groups have gone to writing up an informal contract, called a *memorandum of understanding*, with their academic partners to hold both the academic and the community accountable. Such documents are actually also quite helpful in planning the overall project.

2. *How Good Is the Researcher at Meeting Deadlines?* Community projects and academic projects are as different as any two things called "projects" could be. Community projects almost always have strict deadlines tied to absolute funding or legislative dates. Academic projects often have no deadlines except for the faculty member who needs to have an article published before the tenure decision deadline. Many of my academic friends chafe at the implication that

they can't meet a deadline, and of course many of them are very responsible, but the academic environment is very lax about deadlines, allowing students and faculty to treat those deadlines more as suggestions. It is important to understand that, in academia, it is almost always possible to turn a paper in late. In the case of submitting articles to academic journals, there is no deadline at all. But when a foundation says your funding proposal must be in their hands by 5:00 p.m. on March 15, they mean it. It doesn't matter if you suffered a heart attack on the way to the mailbox. When I served on the review board for neighborhood grants made by the City of Toledo, one of the proposals arrived at the city at 5:15 p.m. on the appointed day—15 minutes late. By city policy, we had to refuse it, and the organization was suddenly out of a chance to gain thousands of dollars in funding. So make sure the researcher understands the project schedule. If students are involved, and the project extends beyond the end of the course, develop a plan for how the research will be completed after the students are gone.

3. Can the Researcher Communicate in a Community Context? Remember that last article you read from a professional academic journal? Remember how much of it you understood? Remember how many times you had to put it down before finally finishing it (if you actually did finish it)? And don't think those questions apply only to community people and students. When I was a graduate student and a new assistant professor, I had some wonderful community mentors who taught me how to write for community audiences. It wasn't about "dumbing down" my writing but about making it interesting—shorter sentences, more common language, catchier phrasing, a more storybook tone, with more real people. Academics and community members need to discuss how they will report on the research and how collaborative the process will be. Another way to assess how well a researcher can communicate is for the researcher to attend a community meeting and find out whether everyone speaks the same language or at least can translate.

4. What Experience Does the Researcher Have? It is not enough for a researcher to be good at collaborating, meeting deadlines, and communicating. The researcher ultimately also must be able to do the work. Does he or she have expertise in the type of research needed for your project? Any past experience with similar projects? If the researcher will be using students, what kind of training and expertise will the students have?

Regardless of these questions, most important to community-academic collaboration is the relationship. Project-based research is time-consuming, unpredictable, and often politically messy. The relationship needs to stand up through all of that. If you are not sure the relationship will be strong enough, then the research may not be good enough.

Loose Gravel

The path to participatory action research is pretty clear—the more participation the better and the stronger the relationship the better. If the researcher engages community or organization members at every step of the research, the chances for success are higher. It's actually not hard

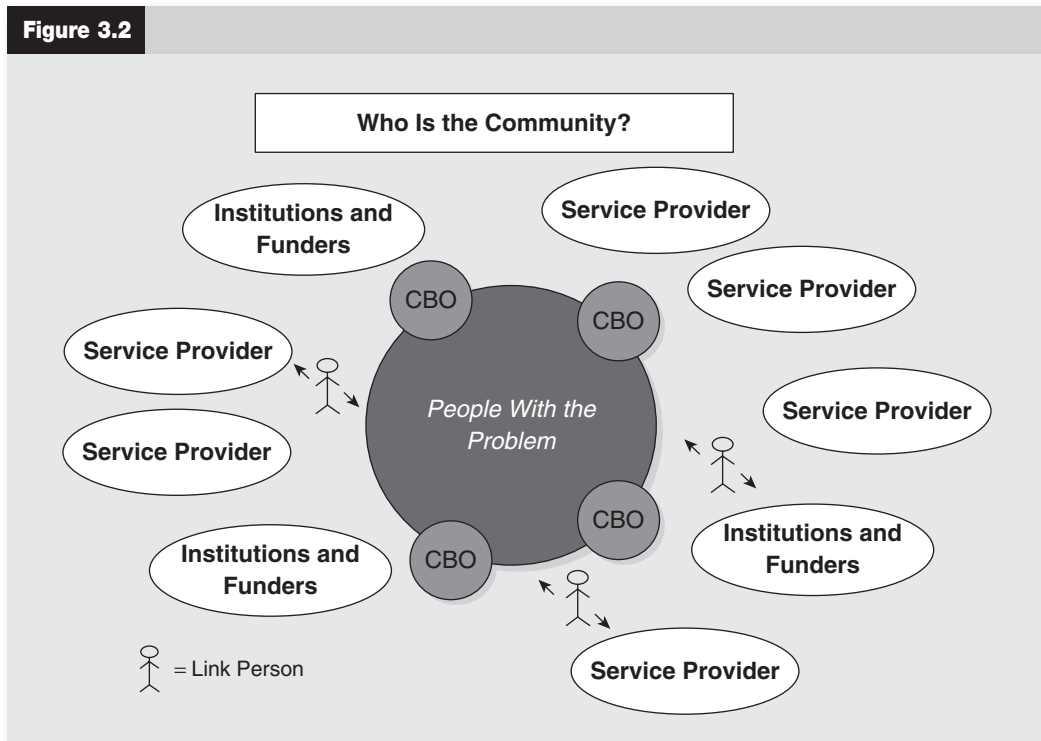
to do. It just feels hard because, for many of us, it requires working across class, race, and cultural boundaries. But it is ultimately the relationships that matter, especially when you hit some of the loose gravel on the way to a successful participatory action research project. It is more difficult, I think, to understand how the research work fits with community development work. We've all had experience with good and bad relationships. But only a select few of us have experienced good and bad community development. In the intersection of research, relationships, and community development, there are four kinds of loose gravel that are important: understanding who the "community" is, determining whether the situation you are researching is characterized by conflict or cooperation, staying focused on outcomes, and using students appropriately.

1. Who Is the Community?

This patch of loose gravel may not apply as much to those working strictly in bureaucratically defined organizations. But those of you in such situations may still confront concerns that the people most affected by the research are not really involved in guiding it. Especially if you are working with a service organization located in a marginalized community, but not controlled by its constituency, this section can be particularly important.

It is interesting to me how reluctant people are to talk about the question of who the community is. Some don't want to talk about it because they fear that the conversation will be divisive. They would prefer to think about us as all one big community, and to talk about *the community* as separate from those of us trying to help will reinforce divisions and cause conflict. Another reason some don't want to talk about it is because, at some level of consciousness, we "on the outside" know that the community is not us. And that applies not just to academics but to foundations, United Ways, government agencies, and even most nonprofits. Because, by and large, those organizations are not controlled by people who live, eat, and sleep with the problems that participatory action research models are designed to attack. And that is where I begin in thinking about the community in participatory action research.

To me, "the community" is the people with the problem: the economically disinvested neighborhood trying to get respectful and effective police protection; the gay/lesbian community trying to get fair marriage and adoption laws; the Latino or African American community trying to stop employment discrimination; the local disabled community trying to get better health care; or the rural community trying to get clean drinking water. The community may be well organized or disorganized. And while I emphasize the importance of communities having some face-to-face spatial character, there are self-defined communities that span spaces. In some cases people may not even define themselves as a community—until a good community organizer brings them together so they can discover their common issues and complementary resources. When people do understand their common issues and resources they sometimes form their own community-based organizations (CBOs)—groups that they as a community control, either by a majority hold on the board of a formal organization or by their mass membership and participation in an informal group. When I worked with the

Figure 3.2

CDC in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood of Minneapolis on their community organizing program mentioned earlier, I found myself working also with the Confederation of Somali Community in Minnesota, the Oromo Community of Minnesota, the Korean Service Center, and an informal Vietnamese group, among the many other noncommunity-based nonprofit organizations.

A step removed from the community are those organizations that are not controlled by the community but are connected to it by staff or board members who come from the community. Those “link people,” or “bridge people,” or “translators,” as they are variously called, are special. In multicultural situations they are the people who not only speak multiple languages but also understand the rules of multiple cultures. In Cedar-Riverside I worked with a Vietnamese community leader, a Somali community leader, a leader in the Oromo community, and a leader of the local Korean community. All were members of their respective ethnic communities and were also running formal community-based service organizations in the neighborhood.

Two steps removed are those organizations with no direct connection to the people with the problem. Their staff or boards may share some structural characteristics—of class, race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or other important characteristic—but they do not share the experience of the problem. Service providers, institutions, government, and other similar

organizations trying to help a community—when they have no community base, no community participation or control, and no bridge people—are often suspect in a community. And yet it is with these twice-removed groups that so many academics partner—something I call *working from the middle*.

This situation confronts us with a number of questions. First, what does a researcher do in a divided community when there are divisive CBOs? This can often seem like the most difficult situation to deal with. But it may not actually be as difficult as it seems. For researchers often occupy a special status in community settings. Similar to newspaper reporters, many people see researchers as people who can help them tell their story. In my many years of working with the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, perhaps one of the most contentious neighborhoods in the country, I have learned a number of lessons in working with divisive neighborhood factions.

The most important lesson is that if you don't take sides, you have to keep secrets. In the many neighborhood disputes I have witnessed over the years, I have more than once been told of the strategy one side had planned to attack the other side. I've kept that information secret, following my basic code that I don't distribute people's information before they have had a chance to review and revise it. Consequently, they had to work out the disputes themselves. And they were much better at it than I would have been.

The second lesson is that there are situations where your own values compel you to choose sides. In one project I did with the CDC in Cedar-Riverside, we looked at the strategies they have used to successfully create over 250 units of housing in the neighborhood. I agreed to the project after two years spent avoiding the housing conflicts in the neighborhood. But I eventually came to see those opposing the CDC as such a grave threat to the neighborhood housing that I felt compelled to give up my neighborhood neutrality. My ethics compelled me to still keep secrets, particularly because those opposing the CDC were community residents rather than outside actors. But my research focused on supporting the CDC to reorganize the affordable cooperative housing they created rather than helping its opponents find a way to transform it into privately owned houses that they could buy low and sell high.²²

A more challenging situation than an organized but divided community is one that is disorganized, where there are no CBOs with any effective capacity. In some cases the researcher gets approached by a service organization working in such a community. The organization itself serves people in the community but has no community members who participate in the organization's programmatic or governance decisions. The participatory action research project can be a way to enhance constituency decision making in the organization itself. I had the honor of working for a number of years with another organization serving people with disabilities. It is one of the situations where, like Sully on Pandora, I went native. I was assigned to them as a government-contracted evaluator for the project I mentioned earlier to help people with developmental disabilities get jobs. They were also assigned a community organizer who was to train one of their staff. The organization staff and board took the project to heart, engaging their constituency in ways they hadn't ever before. In doing so, however, their constituency began to stray from the requirements of the government grant. When it came time to renew the grant, the group they had organized and the government funder were at loggerheads. In the end, the group actually decided to turn down a subsequent government grant in order to maintain their autonomy, and my evaluation ended up analyzing the problems caused by the government's

grant restrictions as much as the “performance” of the group. And, amazingly, the group is still going strong. I just had the chance to work with them again on a little bit of participatory action research and strategic planning, and it was thrilling to see their constituency, in this case youth with developmental disabilities, leading the process.

Thinking of ways that the community (defined, remember, as “the people with the problem”) can be involved in the research also provides an important test of a service organization. Some service organizations have such a long history of not engaging constituency members in program design and implementation that they cannot imagine how to do it. If you are a researcher approached by a service organization, you can propose a method that involves constituency members in decision making about the research and then suggest how such participation can continue when the research actually gets put to use. If you are experienced in such a process yourself, you may even help a traditional service organization make the transition from simple service provision to building the sense of power and efficacy in those people it formerly thought of only as recipients. This becomes even more important if you are approached by a foundation to evaluate a program. I have learned more than once that a research project appearing to be imposed from the “outside” will become little more than shelf research.

2. Is the Situation Characterized by Conflict or Cooperation?

As you are probably already noticing, participatory forms of research can occur across an incredibly wide range of issues. But one of the most important ways that such research can vary is across situations of conflict or cooperation. At one extreme is a group that is organizing its membership to attack a target—a bad-guy corporation or government that has excluded or damaged the community in some way. At the other extreme is a unified organization or community developing a new, noncontroversial program to serve its own members. These two types of projects come from two very different worldviews and illustrate the distinction between what sociologists call functionalist theory and conflict theory.

Functionalist theory argues that healthy societies tend toward natural balance and naturally sort people into jobs and positions according to their individual talents and societal needs. This theory also assumes that people have common interests even when they have different positions in society. Healthy, persistent societies change gradually rather than abruptly. Thus, a group organizing to force change can throw off equilibrium, and cooperation to produce gradual change is a better alternative.²³ In contrast, conflict theory sees no natural tendency toward anything but conflict over scarce resources. In this model, society develops through struggle between groups. Imbalance is the normal state of affairs. A false equilibrium is only achieved temporarily, through one group dominating the other groups. Conflict theory sees society as divided, particularly between corporations and workers, men and women, and whites and people of color. The instability inherent in such divided societies prevents elites from achieving absolute domination and provides opportunities for those on the bottom to create change through organizing for collective action and conflict.²⁴

Different types of organizations often tend toward one of the two models. The community work industry, for example, can be divided into the practices of advocacy, service delivery, the

specialized form of community development practiced in the United States (not the broader form discussed in this chapter), and community organizing. Advocacy—the practice of trying to create social change on behalf of others (such as children or trees or illegal immigrants who are unable to advocate for themselves)—and service delivery—what we normally think of as social services—both tend to occur through midrange, noncommunity-based organizations. Specialized community development—providing housing, business, and workforce development—and community organizing—building powerful self-advocacy organizations—are more likely to occur through true community-based organizations. Advocacy and community organizing are based more on conflict theory, while service delivery and specialized community development are based more on functionalist theory.²⁵

The question becomes how to use participatory action forms of research with each situation. Historically, the labels of *participatory research* and *popular education* have been seen as more consistent with conflict theory, and *action research* has been seen as more consistent with functionalist theory.²⁶

Participatory research and popular education were influenced by the Third World development movement of the 1960s. Academics, activists, and indigenous community members collaborated to conduct research, develop education programs, and create plans to counter global corporations attempting to take over world agriculture. Their research, education, and planning processes led to sustainable, community-controlled agricultural and development projects. The participatory research and popular education models resulting from this movement across India, Africa, and South America have been the leading models around much of the world.²⁷ These models also emphasize people producing knowledge to develop their own consciousness as a means for furthering their struggles for social change.²⁸ Consequently, the highest form of participatory research is that which is completely controlled and conducted by the community. It is interesting in this regard that the most well-known practitioners of this model in the United States, such as the Highlander Research and Education Center, the Applied Research Center, and Project South, are all organizations outside of academia.

The origin of action research is most associated with Kurt Lewin.²⁹ He and his colleagues focused on attempting to resolve interracial conflicts, along with conducting applied research to increase worker productivity and satisfaction. Action research emphasizes the integration of theory and practice and does not challenge the existing power relationships in either knowledge production or material production. It has been used in education settings and in union-management collaboration in research to save jobs and improve worker satisfaction.³⁰ Action research values useful knowledge, developmental change, the centrality of individuals, and consensus social theories. The point of reference for action researchers is the profession more than the community, and the practice is very similar to the models used by professional planners. The action research model emphasizes collaboration between groups and does not address the structural antagonism between those groups emphasized by the participatory research model. Action research instead seeks to resolve conflicts between groups, reflecting the basic worldview of functionalist theory.

The labels no longer distinguish the practices, though these two variations still exist. I use *participatory action research* not to combine the two historical models but to emphasize

the importance of action in the participatory research model.³¹ Regardless of the label one uses, it is still important for the researcher and the community/organization to understand the distinction between practices. When I did the community organizing assessment and education project in Cedar-Riverside, a survey we did with the CDC board showed clearly that the board disliked conflict and wanted to work from a more functionalist worldview. There were many issues the CDC could have taken on by using a conflict approach. For example, the city had suspended a major source of funding for redevelopment in the neighborhood, leaving Cedar-Riverside as the only neighborhood in the city not receiving such funds. But CDC board members wanted to emphasize strategies for bringing the community together around working *for* something rather than working against something, perhaps because they had become worn out by all the conflict over two decades of rebuilding and defending their community.

If the researcher works from a worldview that reflects functionalist theory, and the community worldview reflects the opposite, and the two don't talk about it, each side could actually be working toward a different kind of outcome. And they may not realize it until it's too late. I was, in fact, used to Cedar-Riverside being a rough-and-tumble, confrontational neighborhood always up for a fight. But I did not realize how heavy a toll the neighborhood's internal conflict had taken, since I now lived hundreds of miles away and maintained my involvement through monthly site visits. I was all ready to provide research support so that they could organize a big confrontational campaign. Thankfully, we talked about this very issue, which led to research supporting a community-building strategy rather than a community organizing strategy.

3. Is the Research Focused on Community Development Outcomes?

There is a great deal of research out there that is fully participatory, involving community members at every stage of the process, but has no connection to community development outcomes. One of the research processes that became popularized in the 1990s was asset mapping. Inspired by the work of John Kretzmann and John McKnight,³² an asset map is a list of all the "assets"—everything from the skills of individuals to the availability of various services and amenities in a community. Creating such a list is a massive undertaking, and many community groups invested themselves in the research thinking it would somehow translate into a changed community. Too often, however, their asset map became shelf research because the asset map bypassed the process of choosing a community issue to work on and then actually gathering the resources required to work on it. This is a case of putting the research cart before the community development horse. At the other extreme is the community group who forges ahead on a project with the simple faith that their cause is just, and they will be able to win with moral force alone. But they lack the knowledge they need about both the issue they are working on and the strategies available to work on it.

In both cases, research and action are disconnected. And the weakness common to both examples is the lack of strategic planning. We will be looking at the practice of strategic

planning throughout the remaining chapters, and Appendix A is dedicated to strategic planning resources. Here, it will suffice to understand that community development can't succeed unless it has a clear outcome goal. The community needs to decide what it wants and be able to say how it will know if it succeeds at getting it. The goal may be reducing teen pregnancy by 50%, building 20 units of affordable housing, creating 50 jobs, cutting the murder rate by half in one year, or any number of documentable outcomes. The important thing is to have a clear goal, and any research needs to focus either on deciding the goal or achieving it. The remaining chapters will show how to do just that.

4. Are You Using Students?

The exploding popularity of service learning and other forms of student-community engagement has finally begun surfacing the loose gravel associated with relying on student labor. Separate research studies⁵³ in the last few years have been showing that, while students may be getting a decent education from all their community engagement, communities are not faring nearly so well from the relationship. The focus in colleges and universities has been on using communities to educate students, not on training students to do quality community development work. At the extreme is the oxymoronic "required volunteerism" that results in resentful students sucking resources from too-accommodating community organizations. And communities are beginning to speak up about the inequality of the relationship. They are concerned about the number of students who show up just because they have to fulfill a requirement, rather than because they have a commitment to the organization. They are concerned about the lack of preparation students have and the time the organization consequently needs to spend training them. They are especially concerned about the short amount of time most students spend in the community—often only 15 to 20 hours—and most of those hours involve getting trained by organization staff. And, finally, they are concerned about the absence of faculty in the community. In many cases the organization doesn't even know who the professor is, and in others they have only superficial contact with him or her. They end up feeling as though they are serving the student rather than the student serving them.

Dealing with this loose gravel requires a fairly dramatic change in how many colleges and universities do service learning and even community-based participatory research. While most service learning program staff want to get as many students as possible doing service learning, even to the point of making it a requirement, I do the opposite. Students have to apply to do service learning projects, including participatory action research projects, with me. Being invited or allowed to work on a real community development project, as a student, is a privilege reserved only for those who have shown they have special skills and knowledge to bring to the process. Of course, that puts the onus on the project partners to decide what skills and knowledge are needed. So well before we engage students in a project we sit down together and determine what skills students need to successfully carry out the project. Then we determine what skills they need to enter the project with and what skills we will train them in. Much of the course content, then, is focused on training students to do the

work. In a recent community survey project we decided that students didn't need survey construction and delivery skills beforehand, and then we provided concentrated training in the course itself. Doing this, of course, requires that the course be flexible enough to truly serve the community project. If it's not, it's not an appropriate course for community engagement, as it will inevitably maintain the power imbalance between the community and the higher education institution. The lesson for teachers is this: if you can't make the course truly serve the community, then keep the students in the classroom. The lesson for students is that if you are not prepared to truly serve the community—meaning that you are willing to be a long-term contributor in the community beyond the course requirements, and are willing to get the skills you need before you even approach the community—then keep yourself in the classroom. Those may seem like harsh words, but remember that this book is part of the effort to shape the academy to be as useful as possible to struggling communities. It is also the result of my own learning from community organizations here in Madison and around the world who are feeling exploited by professors and students. Sixty-five of those organizations gave us an earful of advice about how professors and students can be more useful, advice we put into a book called *The Unheard Voices*.³⁴

One of the strategies a number of us are using to overcome the imbalance in community-academy collaborations is project-based service learning. It has some important parallels with the project-based approach used in this book. In project-based service learning³⁵ students commit to carrying out a project with a community group, rather than simply show up to fill a certain number of volunteer hours. The full project-based model takes project-based service learning a step further, showing how service learning projects can be part of a community development process that involves diagnosing a community condition, coming up with a prescription for that condition, and then using service learning to support the implementation while evaluating it to make sure it has a real impact.

But that is still not enough because students can't do all of this by themselves. A project-based cycle can't be completed in a single term. And that means that the students will come and go throughout the project. The only person who can maintain the commitment on the college or university side is the faculty member or a community engagement center staff member. You will see in the coming chapters that none of the examples I will cite come by student labor alone. In many cases, including the best cases, the examples come from community groups themselves. All of the other examples include the central involvement of faculty throughout the process.

We always have to remember that, if we as faculty care about community development, then we are structuring our courses and our research support around community-designed projects, not vice versa. And if that is impossible for faculty to do in their institution, then community engagement is not an appropriate activity for that institution. Even within at least superficially sympathetic institutions, we have a long ways to go, especially with the liberal arts disciplines where practices like service learning are expanding most rapidly. In contrast to the professional disciplines—urban planning, public health, social work, and others that provide specific skill training to students and then provide carefully designed internships or studio-type courses that serve communities as well as students—the liberal arts are extremely unsophisticated in how they prepare students to engage with communities. They provide no

real training for students to work in a community, and only haphazard opportunities. So those of us in the liberal arts—both faculty and students—can gain much from hanging out with friends in the professional degree programs and learning how they do it.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on putting participatory action research in a community development context. And the kind of community development being emphasized is about building community members' capacities to collectively solve their own problems. The principles of community development thus emphasize the following:

- Organizing community members to have power over their own lives
- Facilitating community members to choose issues and develop action plans
- Preventing exclusion and promoting diversity of participation
- Building and expanding leadership
- Supporting the action necessary to achieve community goals

Remember that good community development requires building strong community relationships. In order to assess the potential for such relationships, researchers and community members should ask some questions about themselves and each other.

Researchers should ask these questions:

- Does the community/organization have the capacity to participate?
- What resources can the community/organization contribute?
- Does the community/organization have research needs you can fulfill?

Community groups or organizations should ask these questions:

- Is the researcher willing to follow the community/organization's lead?
- How good is the researcher at meeting deadlines?
- Can the researcher communicate in a community context?
- What experience does the researcher have?

Finally, there are some potentially tricky issues that researchers and organizations need to face in project-based research:

- Who is the community? Is the organization or group sponsoring the research representative of the community or connected to it?
- Is the situation characterized by conflict or cooperation? Do the partners in the project agree on the characterization of the situation and the strategies to use in that context?
- Is the research focused on outcomes?
- Are you using students?

Resources

Community Development Resources

Community Development Society International: <http://www.comm-dev.org/>
 The Community Toolbox: <http://ctb.ku.edu/>
 DeFilippis, J., & Saegert, S. (2007). *The community development reader*. New York: Routledge.
 Green, G. P., & Haines, A. L. (2007). *Asset-building and community development* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Community Organizing Networks

Direct Action Research and Training Center (DART): <http://www.thedartcenter.org/>
 Gamaliel Foundation: <http://www.gamaliel.org/>
 Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF): <http://www.industrialareasfoundation.org/>
 Midwest Academy: <http://www.midwestacademy.com/>
 National Organizers Alliance (NOA): <http://www.noacentral.org/>
 People Improving Communities through Organizing (PICO): <http://www.piconetwork.org/>

Community Organizing Resources

COMM-ORG: The Online Conference on Community Organizing: <http://comm-org.wisc.edu>
 Kahn, S. (2010). *Creative community organizing*. San Francisco: Barrett-Koehler.
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 Pyles, L. (2009). *Progressive community organizing*. New York: Routledge.
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 Staples, L. (2004). *Roots to power: A manual for grassroots organizing* (2nd ed.). New York: Praeger.

Notes

1. Cameron, J. (Writer/Director). (2009). *Avatar* [Motion picture]. United States: 20th Century Fox. One of the more controversial mass-market films of the new millennium, *Avatar* has been embraced by some indigenous and environmental activists, rejected by others, and used as a source of discussion by many of each. For some of the wide-ranging reactions, see *Avatar in the Amazon*. (2010). PRI's The World. Retrieved March 8, 2011, from <http://www.theworld.org/2010/01/29/avatar-in-the-amazon/>; Ivakhiv, A. J. (2010). *Avatar's global affects*. Retrieved March 8, 2011, from http://aivakhiv.blog.uvm.edu/2010/02/avatar_goes_to_china.html; and Justice, D. H. (2010). *James Cameron's Avatar: Missed opportunities*. Retrieved March 8, 2011, from <http://firstpeoplesnewdirections.org/blog/?p=169>. I must admit I have never been a fan of film critiques that try to assert what a film is doing inside people's minds—such interpretive critique is as much a violation of the people's right to participate in their own analysis as other forms of colonizing research. But I am sympathetic to how people describe their own self-perceptions of the film. Here again, there is no agreement, which is one of the reasons I begin the chapter with it.