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# "We Know We Are Doing Something Good, But What Is It?": The Challenge of Negotiating Between Service Delivery and Research in a CBPR Project

Fay Fletcher, Brent Hammer, and Alicia Hibbert

**Abstract**

Engaging communities throughout the research process and responding to community priorities results in constant negotiation between service and research. Community-based participatory research has well established principles intended to guide both the process and goals of research with community. The authors contribute to the body of literature that speaks to the challenge of achieving CBPR ideals amidst the complexity of community realities. When university-based research is aligned with community-based service delivery, at least three sets of expectations must be balanced - those of the community, the university, and the funding agency. The complexity of achieving balance between the ideal and the reality of CBPR, and balance between service delivery and research, were explored using a cyclical process of debriefs throughout the delivery of a youth life skills program with Métis Settlements in Alberta. The value of the process and lessons learned are presented.

The phrase "scholarship of engagement" (SOE) represents an emergent and therefore somewhat nebulous concept in the current domains of higher education and community-university partnerships (Driscoll & Sandmann, 2001; Giles, 2009). Not to be mistaken for "engaged scholarship" (ES), now ensconced in community-university partnerships (CUP) and community-based participatory research (CBPR) literature (Calleson, Jordan, & Seifer, 2005; Horowitz, Robinson, & Seifer, 2009; Jones & Pomeroy, 2009), the intent of SOE is to represent a reflection on the process of doing ES. Since Ernest Boyer (1990, 1996) described his vision of SOE, there has been a tendency over the past two decades for researchers and academics to get bogged down in terminology while trying to reconcile the study of ES and SOE (Giles, 2008) with the ideals of CUP (Calleson, Jordan, & Seifer, 2005) and guiding principles for conducting CBPR that supports collaborative, equitable partnerships that involve long-term process and commitment (Horowitz, Robinson, & Seifer, 2009; Israel, Schulz, Paarker, Allen, & Guzman, 2003).

The purpose of this paper is to report on an approach for SOE research. The authors present a formative evaluation process designed to document the challenges of developing, delivering, and managing a community service delivery program while balancing the goal of and institutional expectation for academic research rigor. The process and outcomes are explored through discussions of complex issues and events during a CBPR project entitled Métis Settlements Life Skills Journey (MSLSJ). We further explore the challenge of balancing the ideas, guidelines, and rhetoric of research literature with the lived experiences of community partners and research participants.

Whether delivering a community service program or conducting a program evaluation, working with, not for, the community remains a priority in CBPR (Wallerstein, Duran, Minkler, & Foley, 2005). Ongoing multi-dimensional communication and relationship building are recognized as key components to effective CBPR projects (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998, 2001); yet they also remain at odds with funders' goals of producing quantifiable results in a timely fashion and academic institutional policies for rewarding achievement (Driscoll & Sandman, 2001; Horowitz, et al., 2009). Academia and project funders largely undervalue sustainable working relationships as outcomes in CBPR projects in general (Shaffer, 2014).

This article explores how a CBPR research team strives to maintain academic rigor in a health oriented CBPR project while addressing the multitude of variables in working directly with people and communities, for example:

You wonder how authentic the engage-



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> ment is when, in order to meet the academic rigor as they define it, they can't be responsive to community priorities and community realities in terms of development. So it's very complicated, right? How do you actually gauge a relationship being authentic and enforce academic rigor that this measures? (principal investigator)

CBPR, CUP, and ES literature clearly articulate their respective principles, in theory (Horowitz, et al., 2009; Israel, et al., 2001; Jones & Pomeroy, 2009). However, in practice, delivering a program with community members and conducting research shaped by their everyday experiences did not fit into prescribed principles and theories. CBPR requires a balance between the ideal and real, and often constant negotiation between service and research. To manage this balance, we created an opportunity to understand the tensions and to garner insight into engagement and capacity building.

Regular debrief sessions were held with the principal investigator (PI), project manager (PM), and research coordinator (RC) at the request of the PI of the MSLSJ project. The motivation came from the PI's experience across multiple projects where "the elephant in the room" was ignored: politics, power, and prevailing stereotypes that many scholars are uncomfortable addressing. The PI shared the hope that debrief participants would commit to an environment where these issues could be openly discussed. The purpose of these debrief sessions was twofold: first, to provide an information-sharing forum for team leaders during MSLSJ implementation, and second, to provide an opportunity for reflection and reflexive analysis, similar to academic journal writing, now encouraged as a part of performing engaged scholarship. Insights gained from this process would be used as formative assessment and to inform planning. Three team leaders, referred to here as participants, debriefed regularly on the ongoing challenges of negotiating between service delivery and research.

While the participants recognize that the statement "we are doing something good" may not satisfy the rigor of academic research, the phrase speaks to the need for a more in-depth understanding of the characteristics needed to achieve success in both service delivery and research. There is growing acceptance in community engagement studies of the value in collecting stories to shape positive change in communities (Romero, 2013). The participants and facilitator chose an approach that involved collecting and reflecting on personal CBPR research stories through cycles of active participation in debriefs by the research team leaders. The process, lessons learned, and outcomes provide insight into the "elephants in the room," expediting progress from CBPR principles to action and reflection on common pitfalls in engagement. This paper contributes to the emerging body of literature on SOE.

## Project Background and Partners

The primary purpose of the MSLSJ program is to increase life skills awareness in a culturally appropriate manner, with the intent of addressing substance misuse and bullying in Métis communities. The MSLSJ program meets the community's goal of incorporating their specific community context in programming and meets the goal of funders to foster safe communities through prevention programs in Alberta, enhance the wellness of Alberta's children and families, and provide skill training for Aboriginal youth. The project employs an interdisciplinary approach by engaging individuals with expertise in education, psychology, recreation and physical education, anthropology, nutritional sciences, and community engagement studies to work with members of the Métis Settlements involved in the project.

The Métis are an Aboriginal group in Canada, some living on self-governed settlements in Alberta. While the Métis have a shared history with First Nations people, they are a distinct group with different lived realities from First Nations communities. The MSLSJ program is part of a Métis settlement research project that builds partnerships with individual settlements and focuses on knowledge exchange with settlement members.

The PI has been collaborating with Aboriginal communities in CBPR projects since 2005 (Baydala, Sewlal, Rasmussen, Alexis, Fletcher, Letendre, Odishaw, Kennedy, & Kootenay, 2009; Baydala, Letendre, Ruttan, Worrell, Fletcher. Letendre, & Schramm, 2011; Baydala, Worrell, Fletcher, Letendre, Letendre, & Ruttan, 2013), supported by the University of Alberta's Faculty of Extension. Participating authors Fletcher and Hibbert, along with Robertson and Asselin (2013), published on community engagement

through needs assessments as part of this ongoing project.

## Documenting Engagement: Meshing Methods in Debrief Sessions

The PI initiated weekly debrief sessions as a way to monitor the progress of the MSLSJ project and to provide a forum for reflection on the process of CUP required for engaged scholarship in CBPR projects. This approach follows a simple, yet effective, principle that the people who are doing the work should also reflect upon it (Smyth, 1989). This supports the current movement of academic institutions and faculty professing engaged learning, discovery, and citizenship to demonstrate their public engagement and contribute to the SOE (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2002; Brukardt, Holland, Percy, & Zimpher, 2004; Faculty of Extension, 2010; Stanton, 2007). The fact that the participants had taken separate academic journeys but had collectively studied critical social theory, cultural relativism, and reflexivity, led to a shared belief in the importance of creating space for multiple perspectives to inform the research process. It was agreed that journaling provided a valuable experiential learning method for exploring engagement in CUP and CBPR (Douchet & Wilson, 2008). Despite this interest, the time commitment required was impractical, especially during camp leader training and implementation. To overcome the barrier presented by this time demand, it was decided that audio recorded sessions would fill this need. The debrief sessions were used as an alternative approach to journaling; dialogue would encourage active and critical reflection. The debrief process complemented other quantitative and qualitative data collection and evaluation pieces already in place for the overall project.

The term “debrief” was selected for this process, representing an informal sharing activity unconstrained by narrow labels. Similar to the First Nations idea of a sharing circle, the debrief activity fit with the perspective of CBPR being an approach to, rather than a specific research method for, evaluating research outcomes.

### *The Approach: Cooperative Inquiry*

Traditional qualitative methods alone would have been insufficient to meet the goals set by the participants – to explore the “elephants in the room” and document the balance between service delivery and research. Cooperative inquiry stems from action research, participatory research, feminist qualitative research, and appreciative inquiry; it was chosen as the debrief approach since it allows for reflective practice and analysis (Heron, 1996). The data collection methods align with the co-operative inquiry approach, emphasizing reflective practice.

### *Methods: Debrief Sessions*

A doctoral student with experience in qualitative data collection, interviewing, and focus groups was hired to facilitate the debrief sessions. The student was not employed by the Faculty of Extension, was not a project team leader, and was not a member of the Métis Settlement. This enabled the debrief facilitator to assume an outsider’s perspective during discussion of this particular project. However, the student had a shared set of values with the participants; his background was also entrenched in the principles of cultural relativism and reflexivity, a key factor in his ability to facilitate the conversation with this group. The student also had experience working with the participants and was able to meet the expectation for safe and open discussions based on a well established level of familiarity and trust.

The debrief sessions were not conducted using traditional interview or focus group protocol. A typical interview process requires non-reaction from the interviewer, so it is important to note that the debrief facilitator did not maintain a strict interviewer-interviewee relationship with the participants. The lack of structure for these discussions also negates its categorization as a focus group.

In practice, the debrief sessions incorporated many elements of unstructured reflective journaling, which can be audio recorded, as well as autoethnography. In parallel to the goals of unstructured reflective journaling, these sessions involved researchers discussing their experiences, assumptions, and choices throughout the research process, integrating new ideas into daily activities. The group process used during debriefs introduced participants to the elements of co-operative inquiry;

> Cooperative inquiry involves two or more people researching a topic through their own experience of it, using a series of cycles in which they move between this experience and reflecting together on it (Heron, 1996, p. 1).

This blend of oral reflective journaling and co-operative inquiry during the debrief sessions satisfied our goal to be informal in our approach


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and to promote ease and comfort among the participants so that practical issues could be discussed. Creating a relaxed and safe environment encourages honesty and the open exchange of concerns, issues, and new ideas. The sessions were unstructured, allowing participants to provide regular updates to one another and to discuss emerging project issues. At the same time, the facilitator had participants focus on recurring themes. It is important to note that the position of the facilitator, who was familiar with the issues and research approach but not directly involved with the project, proved to be a valuable asset to the process and outcomes. Detailed clarification on actions, issues, strategies, and resolutions was achieved by asking who, why, and how questions of participants. These probes promoted intra-group communication and encouraged personal reflection by participants.

On average, the debrief sessions lasted one hour with a range of 43 to 67 minutes. All sessions were voice recorded to document both the discussion content and process. The facilitator uploaded the voice recorded sessions to a secure computer and transcribed them for further analysis. The following debrief transcripts were summarized using the key issues identified in the project's needs and readiness assessment (Fletcher, Hibbert, Robertson, & Asselin, 2013):

1. Barriers and successes in community-university partnerships:
    a. the importance of having a community-specific approach to research
    b. differences among team members (campus/community divide)
    c. reducing the burden of participation among community members
    d. university and funder policies and procedures
2. Stories of change in training youth facilitators

Early in the analysis of the initial debrief sessions, it became apparent to the facilitator that the debrief sessions were also an opportunity to document insights leading to suggestions and considerations for future planning. The debrief summaries served three purposes. First, they were sent to the PM so that immediate concerns about youth facilitator training, implementation, and evaluation could be addressed. Second, lessons learned about the project, program design, and budgeting were noted for future consideration. Third, debrief summaries were filed with all project documents, ensuring that they would be readily accessible for knowledge mobilization activities, including reports to funders, research publications, and community presentations.

In order to further contribute to the project's formative evaluation, the debrief summaries were then analyzed using an inductive qualitative approach in order to identify emerging themes (Thomas, 2006). Seven non-mutually exclusive themes were identified: community service delivery (or project management) vs. research; relationship building; roles and responsibilities; assumptions; youth facilitator training; staff hired to train the facilitators in their camp leader roles; and success of the first year. In total, 16 debriefs were held from May 8 to November 7, 2013, allowing participants to reflect on the entire pilot implementation process. This period encompassed facilitator training and implementation for two life skills summer camp programs for 7–10 year olds at two Métis Settlements in Alberta. The debrief session time period also included discussions about program evaluation through pre/post camp surveys with the campers, focus groups with campers and youth facilitators, and interviews with key team members involved in the delivery of these programs. At the conclusion of the debrief sessions in November, the three participants were asked to write their own summary and reflection on the process and submit it to the debrief facilitator. This was done to provide a summative evaluation sample with the goal of informing the overall formative process and future program planning.

**Emergent Theme: Balancing the Ideals of CBPR with the Realities of CBPR**

Community capacity building has been one of the guiding principles of CBPR and community-engaged scholarship (Horowitz, Robinson, & Seifer, 2009; Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 2001; Jones & Pomeroy, 2009). Chino and DeBruyn (2006) note that the concepts and terms of CBPR, including capacity building, are brought to Indigenous communities by mainstream academics and call for an indigenous informed approach. In response, the authors of this article have adopted the term co-learning, feeling it abandons a deficit based approach and more adequately captures the "important component of research among Native American communities" (LaVeaux & Christopher, 2009, p. 8) that recognizes individual expertise and community strength. The following comment

from the first debrief session illustrates the tension created by the language of capacity building versus co-learning, a tension that has ripple effects on the CBPR ideal of equal community involvement and participation throughout the project:

> Yes, there are principles that are supposed to guide your work and your actions, right? And we’ve already, in working up to this point said, you know what? It’s not reasonable to expect everyone to contribute to every aspect and we’re going to use all our strengths and bring all our strengths together in the best way. What’s interesting is the idea of building capacity in individuals is enviable but to do so without patronizing is challenging. (PI)

This passage highlights a potentially problematic assumption in conducting CBPR, and one that researchers are often hesitant to openly discuss and report on: that the community and its members will actively engage in every aspect of the project. As the research team identified in their needs and readiness assessment (Fletcher et al., 2013), it is often difficult to get community members to participate in focus groups designed to collect their input and engage them in a collaborative process. While it is important to obtain Settlement Council’s support for the program, they are not the individuals in the community that are tasked to do the everyday work required for the project to be successful. Council may support the project in their community but the level of commitment and the capacity to participate may not be the same for the community members involved in the day-to-day activities.

The research team reduced the responsibilities of individual community members, especially volunteers, by acting as the central project managers tasked with the day-to-day administration and serving as the buffer between the university and funding institutions. While, ideally, CBPR seeks to incorporate community input into all phases of a project, that breadth of input can be difficult to motivate; the project management team is required to move forward based on what they do know, as the following quote suggests: “You can try to call meetings to gather input [into these] and if you get it that’s great but if you don’t, your only option is to do it based on what you know from your community relationships.” (PI) This illustrates that some communities, although they are aware of the issues and may provide strategies, are also overwhelmed by day-to-day responsibilities, or may not (yet) see the important and valuable insight they may contribute to resolving specific issues.

The debrief sessions revealed that community stakeholders were not interested in taking on particular tasks often associated with capacity-building (as well as the distribution of power), such as handling budgets and reporting or taking on supervision of co-workers in community. Furthermore, community members appreciated having people with the appropriate expertise to take on responsibility for some of these administrative and supervisory tasks. One debrief participant shared that community members she spoke with were “happy to have people from the [university], or wherever, who have expertise in certain areas to come out during camp and lead camp, that would be fine.” (PM) The PI reinforced this position in a later debrief session, stating:

> This group has strongly said if you can bring someone from outside the community that has the skills, they actually encouraged that. And we can see that as now we are doing this two-way capacity building, we’re not being isolationists; we’re saying we have strengths as non-community folks that we can bring in.

The PI noted that this experience with the Métis Settlements was distinct from earlier experiences; they exhibited a keen willingness to have “outsiders” enter their community to assist in roles that members knew they did not have the expertise or desire to perform. A community member employed by the project reiterated this when she shared her belief that if a community is serious about change among their youth, they need to be willing to work positively with external partners. The team leaders were more comfortable with the decision to bring additional non-community employees to the project knowing that the community not only encouraged it, but also began to see themselves as mentors to university students, who would have an opportunity to learn about their communities. We were gradually coming to a shared and clear commitment to co-learning between not just the research


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team but between settlement and post-secondary youth.

The excerpts from debriefs highlight the importance of building relationships through a process of co-learning that takes place over time. Time allows us to recognize the assets that individuals can contribute to the shared goal. It may be less about addressing perceived deficits in capacity and more about building social infrastructure, as the PI said: "Building capacity isn't [only] building the skills in the community but the relationships and the networks."

**Emerging Theme: Community Service Delivery vs. Research**

Inductive analysis confirmed a challenge apparent early in the debrief sessions: the complexity of managing a project that encompasses the creation, implementation, delivery, and evaluation of a community service while upholding the expectations of a research intensive university and multiple funding agencies. Despite the growing recognition of CBPR (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2008), priority given to connecting scholarship to the pressing issues and concerns of communities (Barker, 2004; Sandmann, 2006), and expectations for community university collaboration (Community Campus Partnerships for Health, n.d.; Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, n.d.), the structures intended to serve the research mandate of the university do not easily accommodate service delivery or attend to the realities of the community. As a result, CBPR researchers often find themselves in the difficult position of satisfying both community priorities and university and funders' policies. For example, the primary focus of the team leaders was to develop and implement – with community input – a program that would have a positive impact, making use of funding for the maximum benefit to the community. This is the direct result of a research team, representing community and university, that has achieved a similar understanding of community university engagement. The program must fit the needs of the community first, not the research goals of the university. To better understand some of the challenges of negotiating between service delivery and the research goals experienced, we present in more detail two ongoing foci of negotiation to achieve a balance of service and research: 1) barriers created by institutional (university and funding agency) policies and procedures, and 2) communication barriers created by language use and terminology.

*Barriers Created by Institutional Policies and Procedures*

The financial agreement between the funder and the PI's institution was spoken of in 12 of the 16 debriefs, making it the most frequent topic of discussion. This speaks to its significance in achieving both the service delivery and research goals of the project. Openly discussing barriers that result from the policies and procedures of researchers' institutions or funding agencies may be considered risky for researchers whose livelihood and reputation rely on funding to conduct research. Jeopardizing those grants or approvals by speaking about the challenges they present is not done lightly. However, the lessons learned in doing so may be the difference between future success or failure in maintaining community engagement while meeting community expectations for service delivery and adhering to the principles of CBPR.

The community service delivery side of the project required funds to pay for community facilitator training, summer camp supplies, community transportation, and food services. Project funding was also required to hire community members as staff to assist in the development of the program content and graduate research assistants to complete data collection, evaluation, and analysis.

By the 12th debrief, the summer camp program was complete and research data collected, yet the primary source of funding had not been secured with a signed contract. The ongoing challenges and subsequent success of managing the facilitator training and running the summer camps speak to the creativity and hard work from the project team leaders to essentially complete the first nine months of a 12-month agreement before money was transferred from the funder. It also speaks to the extra time, energy, and stress that was required to manage and successfully deliver a community service project, "If we didn't have these funding issues, my [goodness] our lives would be so easy." (PC) It is worth noting that this comment came from the first debrief session and not the 12th.

Were it not for interim funding provided by the PI's faculty while agreements were written and re-written, all the activities needed to maintain the community trust and project mo-

mentum would have been interrupted. When so much time is invested in overcoming historical mistrust, the ability to support activities the community has prioritized (service programs) that also have a research and evaluation component is critical. The potential negative impacts of extremely delayed sign-off of contracts and agreements are a serious threat to successful engagement and CBPR.

The difficulty in signing agreements stemmed from the fact that the funding priority was service delivery, but the credibility and evaluative expertise the university brought to the project was valued by the funder. As a result, the principal funding agency used a service delivery template for the agreement. In short, this contract implied that the project team from the University of Alberta's Faculty of Extension was providing a service program to the community and that the funder would "own" the program and any and all data generated from that program. Being a research-intensive post secondary institute, the University of Alberta office responsible for research contracts and agreements identified a number of issues regarding intellectual property and ownership. This arrangement would prove unacceptable to the PI and the university as it undermined the research relationship with the community as well as the university's policies on intellectual property. More importantly, it undermines one of the key tenets of CBPR with Aboriginal people (retaining ownership and control of research outputs) and the decision by the community to make resources open access for settlements throughout Alberta.

The grant agreement reflected funding for service delivery rather than a research program; the intent of the project team was to receive funds for both elements. This again highlights the challenges of delivering a community service program with the research objectives and parameters of university and funder guidelines. The individuals involved in writing legal grant agreements have no social connection to the people involved in the proposed projects. Their obligation is to meet the legal requirements for the institutions they represent. Health care funders and universities are increasingly recognizing the value of qualitative research to long term health benefits for a community. Yet, this example illustrates how funding agencies and communities are often not on the same page. Many of the challenges and frustrations from the first year (tight timelines, training new staff, finding team members with the desired expertise, communication issues, making assumptions, limiting travel to the community, learning on the go) were acknowledged by the team leaders as arising from delays in securing a contract with the primary funder. "The more that we can get funding settled, the more I don't have to be constantly worried about it." (PM) Despite these uncertainties and frustration with the funding contract delays, the frequency of their discussion in the debrief sessions allowed the participants to develop a sense of humor around them, "We already think it's hilarious that we have completely done year one of the program without money." (PC) A sense of humor, while not on the checklist for professorial evaluation, comes in handy when engaging with community in CBPR projects.

*You Say Potato, I Say Potäto: Language Use and Terminology*

CBPR is an approach designed to bridge the gap between university and community. This includes the challenge of straddling two linguistic worlds. The terms theory of change, most significant change, outcome mapping, community-university partnerships, engaged scholarship, scholarship of engagement, and their acronyms TOC, MOC, OM, CUP, ES, SOE, considered useful in scholarly publications and academic discussions, have little or no relevance to community members. The project team learned to listen and speak in different languages: the language of the community (regardless of linguistic dialect) and the language of academia. While labels and terms as noted above may serve to position the researcher as expert in the project, they are not likely to foster community engagement and may, in contrast, alienate community partners. Establishing a common language in CBPR is fundamental to respectful and equitable relationships.The language used to engage community members, like the project itself, must be relevant to the community.

In addition, the full complement of the team represented a variety of academic disciplines, also notorious for promoting their own terminology as part of their distinct expertise. Negotiating the service delivery/research balance as well as interdisciplinarity requires finding a common or shared communication style, language use, and terminology.

The community service delivery contract also used the troubling term "clients" to describe

community members participating in the various facets of the project:

> ... they always want to list clients, like on the report, how many clients did you affect. The new funding ... we're not a research project but kind of a service - they are still listed as clients. So at some point I have to report on our clients and what we have done with them. (PM)

To combat this, reports to funders typically contain the terms "participants" for research participants and "partners" for all other community members involved in the project. We strictly avoid the use of the term "clients" in all reports, publications, and presentations, and have not to date received any backlash for doing so.

Regular debrief sessions over the duration of the MSLSJ development and delivery enabled the team leaders to discuss communication issues early and implement immediate corrective measures for community members as well as the expanded program service delivery and research team. Agreeing on accessible terms and labels, and clarifying their meanings, contributes to open communication.

Conversely, data, information, findings, interpretations, and meaning are often not readily accepted in academic circles and publications until given a discipline-accepted label. As the title of this paper – "We know we are doing something good, but what is it?" – is meant to suggest, the struggle to find an appropriate label to capture the first year experiences of the project is at the heart of negotiating a service delivery program with research objectives in a CBPR project. More succinctly, how do you measure the value of the relationships built and the deep meaning conveyed by those relationships? Through regular debriefs, participants, discussed, debated, and reflected on the many issues that arose during the first year of the project and received feedback on their individual activities on a regular basis. Lessons learned while the project was ongoing allowed for adjustments without affecting the research integrity of the overall project, "So we're doing this constant formative evaluation with a very participatory approach." (PI)

## Lessons Learned

One of the first lessons was the importance of adopting a "learn as you go" attitude when engaging with communities in CBPR projects. As a result, in the discussion that follows, we have chosen to present an example, followed by the lesson learned and then a suggested way to meet the guidelines of CBPR. As managers of service delivery and researchers, you need to be open and adaptable to inter- and intra-community differences and politics and not be overwhelmed when the ideals of CBPR are unattainable. Even the most basic assumptions require more attention than originally planned for. For example, there was an assumption that community members who applied in response to a job posting for camp facilitator positions would understand that a) they would be responsible for teaching children basic life skills in a day camp setting and b) the commitment was to full time work from May through August. Early recognition of differing expectations regarding roles and responsibilities allowed for change to be implemented quickly. For example, schedules were adjusted to accommodate shorter work days and four-day work weeks, rules were set regarding the use of personal cell phone during work time, and more in depth discussions of their role as camp facilitator were incorporated in the training.

Despite extensive CBPR experience with communities believed to have similar dynamics, it was impossible to anticipate how assumptions shaped by previous experiences would be "tested." In other words, every service delivery and research project will test what we think we know. As we became more familiar with the community members and community dynamics, it was clear that research questions and methods should be revised to get to the root of the challenges faced in delivering the life skills program. We also took in stride the unpredictability of participant attendance and adjusted data collection methods – down to the number of evaluation assistants present and physical location of the children in groups – as required. Flexibility and the ability to improvise on the go are essential skills in this work, as well as the ability to think innovatively about conventional principles of CBPR. Facilitators, being community members, knew the children and brought community knowledge and unique expertise. They also recognized themselves that they did not have the depth of expertise to handle everything that occurred at camp and welcomed more outside supervision from the university team members. The regular debrief sessions allowed the team leaders to address these

types of issues immediately, assess the options, and take immediate action as required. This process encouraged creative solutions to specific issues while reducing the burden of individual team members having to make quick decisions on their own.

A second key lesson had to do with the assumptions regarding the composition and size of research team required to achieve the service delivery and research goals. The MSLSJ program proved too complex and multi-layered for the team leaders to manage all details. Subject matter experts from physical education and recreation were hired to give community facilitators the skills and knowledge to teach life skills through play. Research assistants were hired to assist in data collection and analysis. However, hiring undergraduate and graduate students with different disciplinary backgrounds meant that not all of the team members were familiar with the fundamental principles of CBPR and community engagement. This lack of grounding in CBPR is reflected in this comment:

> I think the naivete of people entering into community based work [without prior experience] and thinking that - it kind of sounded like we were doing tokenistic community engagement. It was revealing of a lack of understanding possibly and newness to...community based research. (PI)

Co-learning and relationship building among the academic research team deserves as much attention as is given to co-learning and relationship building between the university and the community. Being self-reflective and analytical, while not always a comfortable process, has proven to be essential to serving the needs of the overall project and community partners.

Timely summaries of the debrief sessions enabled the PM to consider lessons learned while in the midst of planning the next year's program budget and schedule. For example, the following decisions were made with regard to:

1. Project Management
   a. training should occur in the communities
   b. the PC will teach facilitators, linking life skills concepts and activities
   c. we will hire a camp director who is responsible for supervising facilitators
   d. recruitment will be revised to strengthen the hiring of facilitators
   e. we will enforce clear expectations and consequences for facilitator performance
2. Research
   a. participant observation during the summer camps would be valuable
   b. if we feel that a relationship with a partner is weak (based on our understanding of community readiness), the program will not run with that community
   c. outside guests make camp more fun, so plan for more to participate
   d. facilitators would benefit from a peer mentorship design with university students
   e. project outcomes could be improved if all members of the team, facilitators in particular, were taught basic principles of CBPR and the project goals

By discussing and reflecting on the program activities while they were happening, the team leaders came to recognize the importance of identifying the daily small ripples of change which could lead to more significant stories of change for future research purposes. They also learned to be realistic in their expectations for the project such as expecting only small ripples of change in the children after a two week summer camp. Teaching life skills and building resiliency is a long term project. It is also impossible to plan for all contingencies when engaged in community-based projects. The significance of using the debriefs to learn lessons is echoed in this statement by the PI: “Well, it informs what we are going to do for next year; definitely it's changing our strategy and plan for next year.” Subsequent implementation years would have higher quality due to these lessons learned through debrief sessions.

**Moving Forward**

Regular debrief sessions were acknowledged by the team leaders as a more comfortable and efficient method for reflective analysis than individual journaling; they allow for a place and time to vent frustrations and brainstorm solutions.

They were an opportunity to confront assumptions and challenge ideologies and practices, some of those "elephants in the room" that are often not discussed and documented. They were a successful strategy for documenting process and insights for future reference. "So often conversations happen and they are totally forgotten. Like a year from now, some of them [the same issues] will be happening again." (PI)

The debriefs were a way to recognize and celebrate the many small successes that occurred, sometimes on a daily basis. The regular acknowledgement of positive events or moments served as validation to the team leaders that they were "doing something good" and provided motivation to continue to move forward despite the challenges of balancing a community service delivery program with the rigors of research objectives. This reinforced the idea that motivation should be one of the shared goals for the project and that helping to motivate community members, to see the value of the changes they wish to make in their community, is a critical component of co-learning. Capacity is built by creating networks for community members to use once the university exits the community; simply running the summer camps could build relationships in the community.

The debriefs were an effective way to promote regular information updates, to collect data for formative assessments of the program delivery and research, and to test the potential of co-operative inquiry as a novel and valuable tool for ES and SOE:

> You do need to lay out your questions and your methods, all of those pieces that create academic rigor that people are looking for. But we are really trying to explore those other aspects of doing this work that are about the engagement and that do allow the work to make a difference... . That's the real richness in these [debriefs]. (PI)

The debrief process was a positive experience for participants and contributed to the overall project goals. The team will use the debrief process for the second year of program implementation and evaluation. In addition, a community team member will join the team leaders debriefs and separate debriefs will be held with camp facilitators. The expansion of this debrief approach in our own engaged scholarship and scholarship of engagement is increasingly plausible as the relationship with individuals from the community and the community as a whole strengthens.

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