University And Community Partnerships: The Challenges Of Collaborative Knowledge Creation

**Suzanne Michael, PhD, Center for Immigrant Health, New York University, and
Julie Cooper Altman, PhD, Adelphi University**

Increasing demand for evidence-based practice has stimulated renewed attention to knowledge development on the frontlines of practice. The focus, however, is more often on knowledge as products than on the processes of knowledge development itself, including those in which universities and community agencies collaborate to formalize and/or evaluate practice. In this narrative, the authors attempt to explicate the micro-level complexities of a university-community project in which university faculty and agency staff developed practice guidelines for work with immigrant families.

In an era of growing accountability and diminishing resources, community-based agencies are increasingly called upon to develop, transfer in, and integrate new evidence-based practice models (Rosen, 2003; Rosen, Proctor & Staudt, 1999). At the same time, university-based schools of social work are faced with an ever-increasing demand to develop and disseminate knowledge for practice, particularly in naturalistic community-based settings (Proctor, 2003a, 2003b). As each continues to look to the other for complementary collaborative experiences, the need for understanding how to efficiently and effectively create and manage these partnerships grows (Butterfield & Soska, 2004).

The potential for mutual benefits and rewarding reciprocity through university-community collaborations abounds (Fisher, Fabricant & Simmons, 2004; Manela & Moxley, 2002). The university discharges its community service obligation, and expands faculty's access to direct practice and knowledge for teaching (Cohen, Philips & Chierchio, 2001). The agency, with the infusion of additional social capital, new perspectives, new knowledge and/or material resources, further develops its own capacities. Collaborations may also serve to increase both agency and university vitality, currency, and competitiveness (Manela & Moxley, 2002).

Collaborations, particularly those involving research activities, may also foster tensions between communities, community-based agencies, and university partners impacting the willingness of each to establish other partnerships (Fogel & Cook, 2006; Longoria, 2005). A common complaint of communities is that they feel used: as universities pursue their own research or teaching agenda, community members may feel objectified (Fisher, Fabricant & Simmons, 2004). Tensions may also evolve from the differences in institutional cultures, degrees of flexibility, priorities, and resource allocation. Further, expectations and the measurement of results—product and/or process—may affect how community agencies and universities, respectively, perceive the benefits of their investments in "collaborative" partnerships (Mai, Kramer & Luebbert, 2005).

Despite the expansion of literature on university-community partnerships, most studies focus on the products of collaborations, such as program evaluations, research findings, models of practice, trainings, and/or the creation of physical or social resources (Claiborne & Lawson, 2005; Fogel & Cook, 2006). Far less attention has been given to the processes of engagement that take place to produce a product. As a result, agency administrators and university faculty have limited conceptual knowledge about collaborative enterprises or how to develop

mutually satisfying and effective ones (Claiborne & Lawson, 2005; Cornille, Mullis & Mullis, 2003).

To help close these gaps, this narrative reflexively analyzes the collaboration that developed between a medium-sized, multi-service, community-based organization (CBO) located in New York City, and the two of us—faculty from a university-based school of social work (SSW). Data collected during the project and insights that emerged from post-project reflective dialogues between a senior CBO social work supervisor and us, are used to explore organizational culture, motivation, power, role ambiguity, and communication, as well as to generate some suggestions for future practice.

The Collaboration Experience

In the past three decades, New York City's immigrant population has grown significantly. With a foreign-born population of more than 33% (American Community Survey 2007), community based agencies and social work professionals are increasingly called upon to provide a range of prevention, educational, advocacy, and clinical services to diverse populations. These realities set the context for our university-community agency collaboration, the purpose of which was the formalization of practice guidelines for the agency's work with growing numbers of immigrant clients. The collaboration was born of conversations between the senior CBO supervisor and one of us (Author #1). Given that her frontline staff had varied expertise and experience, the senior supervisor wanted to support and enhance her staff's knowledge and approach to working with a diverse immigrant client population. As SSW faculty, we were interested in learning about staff experiences working with immigrant clients so as to broaden knowledge for practice that could be utilized in the preparation of the next generation of social work practitioners. The collaboration was envisioned as a "win-win" initiative. Our focus at the project's inception, therefore, was not the collaborative process, but the realization of shared goals to improve social work practice.

Subsequent to the senior supervisor receiving approval for the project from the agency's executive director, we held a series of meetings with the supervisor to collectively develop the project's scope and proposed activities. The plan was to invite frontline staff to discuss their observations and practice strategies with us and then to collaborate on the development of a practice guide for working with immigrant families. The guide would subsequently be piloted and evaluated by frontline staff. Following the pilot and revisions, the guide would be integrated into agency practice. Further, as a joint project, we planned to share it with New York's child welfare agency for further evaluation, revision, and adoption. As faculty engaged in participatory action research, we submitted and received approval from the university's IRB for the project. Despite the absence of any formal agency mechanism for human-subject research, we provided our IRB materials to the agency and asked the agency's administration to review and approve the project's activities.

A flier inviting participation in the project was then developed by us (the SSW faculty) and distributed by the senior CBO supervisor to frontline staff and their supervisors. A series of group work sessions during lunch were scheduled for interested staff. At the first session, the stimulus for the project and the goal to work collaboratively to develop practice guidelines was jointly explained by the senior CBO supervisor and us. In addition, it was reaffirmed that participation was voluntary. In accordance with the university's IRB guidelines, written informed consent was requested from all staff who decided to participate.

A survey developed by us (the SSW faculty) was distributed at the first session and was completed by staff participants. This survey was designed to discover the extent of staff experience working with immigrants, as well to collect staff and supervisors' knowledge and observations about the immigrant experience. Upon the completion of the surveys, the senior supervisor left the room.

During the next two work sessions, we engaged staff in a discussion about their work

with immigrant clients. What areas were explored during their assessments? What patterns had they observed about the lives of their clients? What were their practice challenges and successes?

We then developed a draft guide that built upon the tacit knowledge and experience shared by staff, along with human behavior theories and analytic models related to immigration (Drachman, 1992; Fruchter 1993; Michael, 2000). The draft guide was designed to stimulate and facilitate workers' more deliberate exploration and integration of content about clients' pre-migration life, the process of migration and settlement, as well as immigration-related strengths and resources that could serve as potential points of intervention. At the next staff lunch work session, we shared the preliminary draft practice guide and solicited reactions and suggestions. Did the draft guide reflect what frontline workers had previously shared? Did they think the draft guide would be helpful in their work?

Several workers commented that there was not enough emphasis on exploring issues of child-rearing and child-minding before and after migration. Other workers felt the guide was too long. Subsequent to this session, we revised the draft to incorporate staff feedback. We also tailored it to the limited amount of time staff had available for assessment.

While attendance had been inconsistent at prior sessions, all participants were present at the fourth session. The refined guide was distributed and a lively discussion ensued, in which staff expressed appreciation that their suggestions and recommendations had been included in the guide. A three-month pilot was then planned, during which staff would use the practice guide whenever they worked with immigrant families. Staff were given notebooks and asked to keep logs of their reflections or reactions to the use of the guide.

Over the next three months, we made several calls and e-mails to staff to inquire about their experiences with the guide. These contacts were both to encourage staff investment in the guide's use, and to gather implementation data along the way. At the end of three months, we collected post-pilot survey data on staff knowledge and observations about the immigrant experience. We also scheduled individual interviews with frontline staff, their immediate supervisors, and the senior CBO supervisor who had helped create the project. The interviews were designed to enable us to understand the use and usefulness of the practice guide. In addition, questions were asked about the guide's development and the collaborative process. All interviews and group discussions were tape-recorded and transcribed. Transcribed interviews and field notes were analyzed to identify recurring themes and/or patterns of experience.

Initial Findings

Twelve agency staff participated in the work groups and nine completed the initial survey. At the end of the three-month pilot, seven staff remained at the CBO. However, only three post-pilot surveys were returned and only four staff members were available for interviews. Staff attrition and reassignment of several staff (thus reducing their immigrant caseloads), made it difficult to assess the utility of the collaboratively developed practice guide.

Nevertheless, as we reviewed the transcripts from the work sessions and individual interviews, we realized much had transpired during the collaboration. A practice guide for working with immigrant clients had been produced (Authors, 2007).[1] Staff remarks from the sessions and from post-pilot interviews reflected greater understanding about the challenges of migration and more positive views about working with immigrant families. As their knowledge widened and perspectives changed about the impact of immigration on their clients' lives, some staff indicated their practice had also shifted to be more exploratory with fewer assumptions, if not judgments. Furthermore, several staff stated that the collaborative process itself had been personally satisfying and they had grown professionally. Post-pilot interviews with staff and supervisors also revealed important content about the challenges and successes of university-community collaborative knowledge creation.

Intrigued by the content that was emerging about the collaborative process, above and beyond that which is already available and known from the literature (Fisher, Fabricant & Simmons, 2004; Mai, Kramer & Luebbert, 2005; Manela & Moxley, 2002), a decision was made to engage in a reflective dialogue with the senior CBO supervisor. Over several months the content of these conversations resulted in an unintended but significant product of the project. To assist other community agencies and universities—institutions whose needs can also complement and benefit one another—we present below some of the insights and lessons we learned about collaboration.

Issues, Perspectives, and Lessons Learned
Issue 1: Organizational Climate and Culture

To survive in a rapidly changing political, social, and economic landscape (Mulroy, 2004), community-based agencies must be dynamic, and able to rapidly respond to shifts in client needs, public policies and/or funding resources. As a result, the internal worlds of CBOs are often intense, fast-paced, and turbulent. Staff attrition is part of this "turbulence," especially amongst low-paid, entry-level staff. Unfortunately, multiple staff changes result in a loss of accrued experience, and impact the development of intra-staff supportive relationships and encouragement. As the senior CBO supervisor reflected:

> *We are all frenetic, not necessarily in a bad way, but are constantly putting out the fires, dealing with crises. The work we do is hard, stress and burnout is (sic) prevalent, staff turnover is a constant issue, staff being young, staff moving (on)...*

In our collaboration, the CBOs' relatively small number of program staff influenced the size of the project's recruitment pool. Compounding small numbers was the fact that two thirds of the staff who joined the project at its beginning had left the agency or had been reassigned when the project ended nine months later. Several supervisors also changed. Therefore, despite ongoing administrative "buy-in" for the project, on-the-ground staff changes affected the climate of engagement throughout the project, as well as the ability to successfully complete the pilot and evaluate the practice guide. In addition, after the pilot, there were insufficient numbers of project staff to foster the guide's wider integration into agency practice.

In contrast to the agency's "turbulence", the university setting is slower paced, more predictable. In general, faculty have the luxury of time to ponder, deliberate, think, restructure, and debate issues and strategies. Faculty also have greater control over their schedules and are largely protected from the exigencies of rapidly changing priorities, expectations, and resources.

Agency staff and university faculty also differ in important ways in their relationship to knowledge, its creation, and utilization. University faculty are expected to engage in research to create new knowledge. On the other hand, agencies and their staff are expected to use theoretical knowledge, evidence-based models, and practice knowledge to provide services. At the same time, in today's cost accounting landscape, social service agencies are increasingly required to engage in evaluation research to inform service delivery and respond to external mandates. Yet, given the histories and cultures of agencies and their dependence on external funding, many agencies may be reluctant to engage in research focused on practice knowledge (Herie & Martin, 2002). Their inhibition is based on their perception of risk: the potential public identification of staff or system problems and/or negative outcomes affecting future funding streams and inter-organizational referrals. Ultimately, in the present case, this sense of exposure contributed to the collaborating agency's administrative decision not to be identified, nor to have the senior CBO supervisor—who had helped to initiate the project, actively worked with us on it, and contributed to the development of the article—listed as a co-author.

Lesson Learned: Explicitly acknowledge differences in culture and climate between the community agency and the university.

Acknowledging and articulating differences in culture and climate of the collaborating partners helps to affirm readiness for, commitment to, and engagement in the project, and creates the context in which problem solving around differences can take place. Organizational cultures have been characterized as "hidden, unifying themes that provide meaning, direction, and mobilization" (Kilmann, 1984, p. 84). When two different organizations collaborate, their respective cultures affect the form and substance of the interaction (Fisher, Fabricant & Simmons, 2004). In the process, the culture and climate of each organization becomes increasingly visible, and become factors with which to reckon.

Embracing the complexity inherent in real world service settings is a challenge that must be faced with determination by administrators, clinicians, and researchers. Knowledge about each organization's culture and climate is essential to assess both the capacity and readiness of each to commit to the joint effort. There needs to be recognition of and open discussion about similarities and differences and how they may affect the process and outcome of the collaboration. This includes administrative and practice priorities, the pace of the work, possible changes in organizational resources, staff patterns, hierarchical decision-making, and informal staff dynamics. Attention to the agency's dependency on external funding and compliance with external mandates and the risks of exposure through public dissemination of results must also be recognized and integrated into collaborative planning.

Issue 2: Motivation

Collaboration often brings partners together for different reasons, with different motivations and perceived incentives. Classical theories of motivation suggest that inducements of a material or non-material nature help ensure participation in any organizational innovation. Other factors related to motivation in practice and/or organizational change may include desirable physical conditions of the work, benefits of association, a "condition of communion," and indirect incentives related to personal distinction and prestige (Vinokur-Kaplan & Bogin, 2000). Scholarship on community-based research and evaluation indicates that the level of ownership in a project, either initiating it or being involved in its development, affects motivation as measured by rates of participation (Dore & Lightburn, 2006).

As faculty, our incentives included professional and personal satisfaction of knowledge creation and dissemination as well as potential downstream rewards from the academy: tenure and promotion. The senior CBO supervisor expressed her motivation in terms of renewed association with the university, and further recognition within the agency, as well as potential publicity for the agency. The agency's administration perceived the collaboration as an opportunity to add to its portfolio of initiatives in immigrant services, and gain status through a university partnership.

Harnessing frontline staff's practice wisdom was the focus of the project from its inception, but the project had been initiated by a senior supervisor in collaboration with individuals external to the agency. All of us—faculty, the senior supervisor, and the agency's administration—framed the project as an "enhancement of social service practice." Yet, neither frontline staff nor their line supervisor had "named" or framed the issue or focus of the project. Thus, from the beginning, we wondered if there were enough intrinsic motivations and/or extrinsic incentives for staff to voluntarily engage and stay engaged in the project. This apprehension was affirmed later when we learned in post-pilot interviews that more than a few staff had initially wondered: "How is this relevant to me? Why do they want me to change or why should I change?" Upon reflection, we also realized that meta-communication, administration of the initial survey and use of the consent forms, conveyed the message that this was a research project about them, and not a collaborative endeavor in which they were equal partners.

Further, while there had been no stated explicit positive or negative consequences for

staff participation or non-participation, staff revealed in their comments during the work sessions and in post-pilot interviews that as line workers their recruitment by a senior supervisor could only be translated to mean, "participation is desired, if not expected." Non-participation would affect their supervisory relationships. At the same time, staff were already feeling overwhelmed by competing work demands and pressures on their time. Further, there was no indication of shifts in workload. In fact, several staff members were scheduled to attend concurrent training sessions at another location. Therefore, without any material inducement other than free lunches, staff experienced a push/pull for participation. As one frontline staff stated:

> Well, my reaction was, like, oh my gosh...we are, you know, we have so much work already and...if you noticed, I wasn't in the first few session...I was umm....kind of wary about, you know, doing extra stuff...like I said. But then, having done it, I found it very interesting.

With the benefit of hindsight, we recognized along with the senior CBO supervisor, the degree to which we had all underestimated the importance of clear and explicit communications about our own respective motivations for engaging in this collaborative project. The agency's administration's perceptions and perspective about the collaborative enterprise had not been sufficiently communicated. And, we acknowledged that we had been less than successful in the human process of "problem setting" (Schon, 1983), in appreciating very different levels of incentives and motivations, or in working with staff to establish new ones.

Lessons Learned: Explore different incentives and motivations for collaboration. Reach out to and include frontline staff in the early conceptualization of the collaboration.

Prior to the development of a collaboration, there needs to be outreach to and inclusion of all potential partners and their active engagement in establishing the parameters of participation. As a result of their direct community work, frontline staff are probably best situated to identify the need for, if not initiate, inter-institutional collaborations. However, in most settings they need both the support of administration and the resources to move forward. Thus, even with administrative interest, limited "legitimacy" and large case loads make it very difficult for frontline staff to initiate and follow through on their own. More frequently, collaborative projects are initiated and/or implemented by senior staff and management as part of their "spanning" functions. Nonetheless, regardless of the origin of initiation, once a collaborative project has been conceived and authorized, staff must be actively involved and integrated in the process of actually developing the project. As part of this process, it is critical that staff and inter and intra- institutional hierarchies and power relationships are explicitly acknowledged. Possible benefits and liabilities of participation or non-participation must be candidly discussed. In addition, there needs to be an examination of different incentives and motivations and how they might impact levels of participation within and across the collaborating institutions.

Issue 3: Power

In our university-agency partnership, the creation, use, and ownership of knowledge powerfully resonated as each member of the collaboration sought to legitimize him/herself, as well as relate to the project's goals. The project was initially conceived by the senior CBO supervisor and one of us (Author #1). However, once the project was initiated, we—the SSW-based authors—essentially shaped the trajectory of the collaboration. To some extent this reflected our more extensive experience in developing action research, but also signified essential, even if not articulated, power derived from pre-existent social and cultural hierarchies (i.e., the traditional privileging of the academy over the community-based organization).

Asymmetry of personal characteristics was also present. Given the history of structural oppression and a stratified society, racial and ethnic differences combined with class and academic status gave unfavorable

potency to initial interpersonal dynamics. The conveners of the project—the senior CBO supervisor and both of us—are white. The majority of frontline staff and their supervisors are people of color. As SSW faculty, both of us have doctorates. The senior CBO supervisor has a masters degree. All of us earn higher salaries than frontline and supervisory staff. Our conscious use of first names throughout the project was insufficient to diffuse the power of these dynamics.

Power differential also existed in respect to the "voluntary" nature of frontline staff participation. Perceived liabilities of non-participation reflected staff hierarchies. In retrospect, frontline staff's only base of power was resistance by sabotaging the project. But, given that the agency's director sanctioned the partnership, such action may not have even been a choice.

Initial unequal status was highlighted at the first work session, when staff were asked to sign consent forms and to complete a survey. These activities further contributed to the perception that staff were study subjects, not co-equal participants.

Conscious of potential discomfort of frontline staff to discuss their practice in front of supervisory staff, we made the decision that the senior CBO supervisor and other line supervisors would not attend the first work session during which we assured staff that we would not reveal, except in aggregate form, any practice issues and/or observations discussed. In retrospect, despite best intentions, these assurances may have backfired (i.e., our assurance inadvertently communicating that staff were not only subordinate, but also at risk).

Nevertheless, in work session discussions and in our incorporation of staff experiences, ideas, and suggestions in the draft guide, we continually validated the richness of staff practice observations, knowledge, and expertise. Thus, despite some significant and potentially lethal initial missteps, over the course of the collaboration, staff shared with us their increasing sense of ownership in the project. Reflexively, staff also articulated their growing consciousness that in fact they possessed important knowledge about working

with immigrant families. Not only could they learn from one another, but they could also educate us. Consequently, by the end of the project, the balance of "knowledge as power" shifted, becoming more diffused among the participants. As one staff member reflected:

> *...this was a lot more, we give, and then you take what we say into account, and really put what we suggested into the tool...what we said was heard and taken into account...*

Lesson Learned: Explicitly address power dynamics, including symbolic power and status, in decision-making and identify and validate multiple sources of power.

All participants must pay attention to power dynamics at play throughout the duration of the collaboration. While they may not be avoided, unveiling them can minimize their impact. When collaboratively developing knowledge, each institutional partner needs to recognize that collaboration does not occur in a power vacuum. As the participatory process evolves, collaborators need to "tolerate ambiguity," and the potential loss of control in project design and implementation (Alvarez & Guitierrez, 2001, p.14). Continuous acknowledgement and explicit validation of multiple sources of power can help to minimize the impact of differential power, as well as help to shift the balance of power. At the same time, collaborators need to be mindful of the ongoing impact of symbolic power and status in decision-making processes and how authority is interpreted by all stakeholders. Regular and open communication can be essential to mediating, if not reducing a power imbalance.

Issue 4: Roles – Am I an Expert or a Subject?

As originally conceived, the project was based on the belief that frontline staff possessed rich knowledge that was not explicitly recognized or utilized, even by those who possessed it. The goal of the project was therefore to mine frontline staff's tacit knowledge and experience working with

immigrants to identify themes and patterns of experience that might clarify and enhance strategies of assessment and intervention. Then the collaboration was to facilitate a process of systemizing it to "put sense into the 'jumble'; to help organize the noise; and to give it a name"(Epstein, 1996, p. 3). The end product, the practice guide that eventually would emerge would reflect collective wisdom (Scott, 1990), the integration of the expertise of each of us—frontline staff and faculty— that had been brought to the table.

As in other participatory or action research, the blurring of researcher and subject roles affected both the nature of the research itself and the output or product (Bradbury and Reason 2003; Moxley, 2004). Work sessions were designed as opportunities for frontline staff to reflect on their practice experiences and to identify, translate, and transform their tacit knowledge; and for the two of us, to be both facilitators and learners. Despite our self-perceived roles, we learned it was difficult for frontline staff to accept that university professors were "the learners." At the same time, staff experienced their own ambiguity. As one staff member stated: *"I just would've wished that there was more explanation about what it was about, what we had to do..."*

The project required the staff to shift from "doing and knowing" and "knowing by doing" to "knowing through thinking" (Bradbury & Reason, 2003, p. 158); to become the embodiment of the "reflective practitioner" (Schon, 1983). For some staff, the shift from their primary and valued role in the agency (to help others) and a task orientation to more of a conceptual orientation was difficult.

In addition, some staff experienced role conflicts. Despite the CBO's administration's sanctioning of the project, the work groups did take staff away from their primary responsibilities as service providers. This caused scheduling problems and/or staff anxiety about timely completion of required case documentation, which raises a basic challenge for community agencies interested in research endeavors. Given multiple demands and insufficient resources, how can agency administrators and staff balance their mandate for direct services with participation in a project? How can they invest resources when the outcome cannot be certain, and may in the end provide a more general contribution to knowledge than enhance specific agency practices?

Lesson Learned: Recognize the multiple roles of all participants, and the potential for each individual involved to be both a "thinker" and a "doer," an expert and a subject, as well as inherent role conflicts that may emerge.

Agencies and universities need to actively work against the false dichotomy of roles. Culturally, the university is legitimized as a site for research and the development of new knowledge. Faculty are perceived as "thinkers." In contrast, agencies and their frontline staff workers are generally regarded and rewarded as "doers." Thus, they are usually not perceived as creators of credible and legitimate knowledge. As a result, staff's critical insights and their practice knowledge often do not get recognized or widely disseminated (Fisher, Fabricant & Simmons, 2004; Manela & Moxley 2002; Scott, 1990). In terms of collaborations, this requires agencies, despite many other priorities, to explicitly identify and recognize the potential of their practice to contribute to the expansion of professional knowledge. Cohen et al. (2001) have proposed the development of creative models that allow for greater fusion, as well as the reduction if not elimination of the classic "thinker/doer" dichotomy of university and agency collaborations. This proposed fusion includes the creation of funding streams to stimulate and support agency-initiated research, as well as resources to support the dissemination of created knowledge, e.g., paying the cost of frontline staff's participation in professional conferences.

Issue 5: Communication

In both the literature on collaboration and knowledge development, as well as in most of social work practice, good communication is considered essential to effectiveness. It has also been suggested that the communication process itself can be transformative in both endeavors (Fook, 2003, p. 125). Issues related to communication pervaded our collaboration.

From recruitment to implementation our best efforts at communicating clearly, comprehensively, and meaningfully fell short.

Initially, we were not in direct communication with frontline staff. Instead, recruitment for the project and the scheduling of work sessions relied on the supervisory hierarchy. As such, we may have inadvertently reinforced top-down, hierarchical relationships, and thus reduced our ability to engage staff as true partners in knowledge development. As noted by staff in a post-pilot interview, the message staff heard differed from that which we had intended to convey:

I was just told to be available at this time because...they just said research...they just said some type of research was being done having to do with immigrant families and they wanted us to participate.

Given staff comments at the pilot's end, it is also clear that both the agency's hierarchy and the two of us did not fully nor successfully communicate the nature of the project and the centrality of staff to its process and outcome: the experiences of front line workers dealing with immigrant clients. Being outsiders, we did not adequately communicate who we were, our own experiences in child welfare and immigrant services, and our own gaps in knowledge. We needed their expertise but some staff perceived the opposite: frontline staff were the ones who needed university faculty to help them enhance their practice. This may have been an issue of language, of meaning, of projection, of culture, or perhaps all of these. In the words of the senior CBO supervisor:

To me, staff never felt ownership as true partners in the project until the last group session when they sensed they were valid, active partners in the creation of the tool itself. It was only then that they realized that the researchers were not just offering lip service to them "being the experts" and wanting their practice perspectives, but that they were truly using their words and ideas to put the practice guide together.

Lesson Learned: Use multiple modes to communicate with all participants and constantly check out if the message sent was the message received.

Communicate meaningfully, frequently, and directly within and between all collaborative partners.

There can never be "too much" communication. University-community agency collaboration, especially that which begins with senior staff, must build in opportunities and strategies that can diminish communication diffusions and distortions so often exacerbated by the dynamics of status, power, and culture. These can include directly communicating to line staff instead of through their supervisors, consistently checking with receivers to be sure the messages sent were that which were received, and communicating briefly but frequently via more than one mode (e.g., phone and email messages). Another technique includes asking line staff to share the intended message with others, both as a reliability check and as reinforcement.

Communicating directly with line staff can be transformative and empowering. In the end, staff's experience was that we heard what they were saying, and we valued it enough to incorporate it in the final collaborative product. This shifted both power and motivational dynamics for the better. Developing strategies to validate and incorporate the tacit experience of frontline staff should be one of the collaboration's first tasks. Engaging all participants throughout the collaboration in actively reflecting and assessing the collaborative process, not just its product, is vital.

Conclusion

In reflecting about our university-community collaboration, the story of Rashamon provides a good metaphor. Each participant's incentive and motivation was different, and each perceived and lived the experience differently. Yet, at the end of the project, there was shared satisfaction that we had collaboratively produced knowledge in the form of a practice guide for working with immigrant clients. Staff comments at the last

session and in the interviews revealed how the process of the collaboration had impacted staff both professionally and personally, perhaps the most important lesson learned of all. Frontline staff stated that the affirmation of their work by fellow workers, supervisors, and SSW faculty had increased their sense of self-efficacy and their self-confidence as social workers. For many, the discussions leading to the development of the practice tool raised their consciousness as immigrants and members of immigrant communities, promoting self-reflection about their ethnic and immigrant identities and stimulating personal and professional growth, including a desire for further education.

Engaging staff initially in deconstructing their practice wisdom around immigration prompted critical thinking and more reflective practice in other areas of their work. The senior CBO supervisor stated that she had gained new insights about her staff, as well as organizational and supervisory processes. And, as social work faculty, we realized that the project had expanded our practice knowledge and had, despite all its challenges, increased our skills as members ("citizens") of the community and researchers. The "value-added" of the experiential process—professional and personal development—we thus recognized as unintended but important products of the collaboration.

These insights stimulated a reassessment of how best to conceptualize our current work, and the process of future university/community collaborations. As stated earlier, our initial motivation was not "civic engagement," but rather the formalization of tacit knowledge and the dissemination of knowledge. Nevertheless, given our value commitments, from the beginning we consciously inverted the town-gown paradigm and tried hard to reduce the traditional "imbalance of power" (Fisher et al., 2004, p. 30). We did not view the community agency as a client or subject. Instead, from our perspective as faculty, we envisioned the collaboration as a partnership focused on the expertise of staff. In addressing practice issues, we attempted to structure the project as working with staff, rather than on them (Bradbury & Reason, 2003, p. 156). From the

agency's perspective, the collaboration had been initiated as an opportunity to enhance service delivery, to gain further recognition through the dissemination of the practice guide, and to affirm its image as a "learning" organization, committed to growth (Manela & Moxley, 2002).

Fogel and Cook (2006) write about the "interpersonal relationships" that comprise university-community partnerships and the need for "equity of exchange" (p. 600). In terms of output, the collaboration produced a practice guide that the CBO staff and supervisors can use in their work with immigrant clients. As faculty, one of us (Author #2) has used it in a class on child welfare and the other (Author #1) has used the guide in a course on social work practice with immigrants and refugees, and as a case study in a course on organizational practice. Are these equal "products" in the context of our university-community collaboration? That depends on their relative importance to the respective participants (as discussed above), who reflect an array of motivations and differ in terms of status and power.

In the context of increasing university-community partnerships and the scholarship of engagement, our observations support the need to widen the lens of inquiry and to actively recognize the multiplicity of meanings and effects in similar projects. These include those less explicit or tangible that may resonate way beyond a project's primary intent. For example, it is far more common to use "university-community" partnership or research than "community-university." The former construction privileges the university and fosters the sense that it is the community which is being linked to the university and not the inverse. While possibly an issue of semantics in some situations, in our collaboration such a construction presages symbolically the locus of power and knowledge—the university and its faculty—when in fact the knowledge of concern was very much located within the community. Attention to the context of community and university partnerships and how we frame such partnerships are therefore areas that need to

be further explored by both community providers and university faculty.

In summary, this article demonstrates that universities need to be committed to a reflective and flexible engagement with communities, especially in collaborative partnerships around knowledge creation (Manela & Moxley, 2002; Fook, 2003). It also suggests the critical importance of creating the resources and opportunities for agencies to engage in reflective activities, to harness their practice knowledge, and to partner with universities and other institutions so to maximize the possibilities of "making implicit practice knowledge explicit" (Zeira & Rosen, 2000; p. 104). We hope that the insights and perspectives we have shared may contribute to increased understanding about collaborative community-university projects and help others to achieve more effective and satisfying ones.

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Suzanne Michael, PhD, was an Assistant Professor at the Adelphi University School of Social Work, and is now a consultant at the Center for Immigrant Health at New York University. Julie Cooper Altman, PhD, is an Associate Professor at the Adelphi University School of Social Work, NYC. Comments regarding this article can be sent to: altman@adelphi.edu

(Footnotes)
[1] For a copy of the AID (Assessment of Immigration Dynamics) tool, write to Author