

**The more we get together:  
The politics of collaborative research between  
university-based and non university-based  
researchers**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

In the last decade there has been an increased interest in collaborative relationships between universities and other sectors of society. In research, the “partnership trend” has translated into collaborative research projects between university-based and non university-based researchers. This dissertation explores the experiences and understandings of university-based and non university-based researchers about their collaborative work. Specifically, this study looks at the motivation social researchers have to engage in collaborative projects, how their understandings of research and of collaboration influence the relationships they establish with each other and the conditions that participants believe promote collaborative research.

The research is based on in depth interviews with twelve university-based and non university-based researchers who have had experience in collaborative research. The researchers interviewed chose to engage in collaborative research because they believe it is an approach that has the potential to involve different perspectives and enrich the research process, resulting in benefits to the community and to the university. The fact that many of the projects described by the researchers were ultimately in the hands of university-based researchers meant that formal academic ways of understanding and doing research were followed. Funding requirements and a lack of fit between academic reward systems and collaborative research processes strongly influence the kinds of collaborative relationships that university-based researchers can and choose to establish. These influences often mean that traditional academic notions of research overpower the collaborative process, limiting the potential of different perspectives to emerge.

Collaborative research has the potential to become a space where researchers from different locations come together to generate knowledge. For this potential to be realized, all collaborating researchers’ perspectives have to be considered as valid. This consideration would require a deconstruction of the conceptions of

research that researchers bring to the relationship. The study ends with a strategy for those researchers who are considering building collaborative relationships to engage in conversations that explore the meanings of research they bring to the project as well as an analysis of how their locations influence the relationships they build and the knowledge they can generate individually and collectively.

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I started to imagine this section of my dissertation many years ago as I was walking on a bright sunny Saturday morning to my supervisor's office. I was thinking about how much Allison's support was helping me make progress in my program. On that day I thought of how using her office during the weekend allowed me to write the comprehensive exam away from the demands of my young child. During the past years, there were many more instances when I added examples to Allison's support; holding weekly meetings at my house when it was too hard for me to move around in a timely manner with my newborn child or going to the beach for long walks when I was feeling stuck. I feel privileged to have Allison as my supervisor. She has always been interested in me as a whole person and has worked with me to find ways to fit the doctoral program in my life, even when it seemed impossible. I know that both she and I have been waiting for my graduation so that, without the necessary constraints of the roles we have as graduate student and supervisor, we can become friends. I am looking forward to that.

Being a graduate student, especially in the doctoral program, is not an individual process. This is particularly so for students who have young families. In my case, I was lucky to have a partner who supported me in many ways. He endured too many weekends alone with the kids. He graciously listened to my complaints about the frustrations of writing a dissertation. He even accepted that although we were together at a party, I was – at the same time – “writing” a section of my dissertation. As in all other areas of my life, Claudio is my constant support. He is my partner, *mi compañero*, in the rollercoaster of life.

I have been a graduate student for the duration of my two sons' lives. Jeremy and Joshua could not wait until I was done. “Oh, not the dissertation again! When are you going to be done?!” I am happy to be able to tell them that I am done now, that we can plan our weekends together now. I am also proud to have shown them that regardless of how difficult, how frustrating, and even how

long something can take, if one wants it badly enough and works at it hard enough, it is doable.

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## **CHAPTER 1: Starting with location**

When I moved to Canada, people used to ask me what type of work I wanted to do; I would answer that I wanted to be a researcher. “Oh! You want to be a professor, you want to stay in the university,” they would reply, “that’s not for me, I am not a lab person.” It took me a while to understand that we were referring to different practices. I envisioned being a researcher as something broader, with potential affiliations with different social institutions. In my experience in Argentina, being affiliated with a university was not exclusive. Due to low salaries, having to make a living in Argentina requires that university professors take additional jobs so professors also work at other institutions. Often, these jobs usually involve a heavy research or educational component, drawing them to a close link to non-university organisations and, with this, reducing the distance between the university and other social institutions. In my mind and experience, social researchers - including university-based researchers - are not “lab people,” they work with people in schools, community centres, trade unions, grass roots associations and private companies.

My research experience in Argentina had shown me that this was possible. Between 1986 and 1989 I was involved in socio-economic research in a neighbourhood in the City of Buenos Aires with the University of Buenos Aires. The team that carried out the research collected data by interviewing and observing different sites and people. As part of the research project, the team

organized a variety of social and educational activities in the neighbourhood, which in turn yielded new data. We saw ourselves as social animators and educators. In other words, we identified ourselves with a dual role of community researchers and educators that were affiliated with the university.

Since I started to work in research in Canada, I have been part of several collaborative projects between university researchers and researchers who are not based in a university. Between 1992 and 1994, I was part of a National Literacy Demonstration Project. This project was initiated by the director of an adult literacy program who contacted university researchers to work together on the evaluation of two adult literacy centres in the Lower Mainland. The team involved in doing this research included two instructors, one from each of the two programs participating in the evaluation. Later, I was part of a team that looked at childcare work in the Lower Mainland. Again, this project included a partnership with a community organisation.

In 1998 Audrey Thomas, Education Officer with the British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education contacted my supervisor, Dr. Allison Tom, to find ways to help literacy practitioners develop and carry out research projects. Allison included Lyn Harper and me in this project. Practitioners would send us their ideas for research proposals and we would give them feedback. After a year, Lyn decided to focus primarily on her doctoral work and Allison took a background role allowing me to take the lead responsibility in supporting adult

literacy practitioners to do research. In 1999, I signed the first of several contracts to encourage, train and support practitioners who work in literacy and adult basic education organizations in British Columbia to engage in research. My role has been, and continues to be, that of a “research friend”; answering questions, suggesting strategies and initiating conversations about research among a wide group of literacy practitioners and learners interested in doing or learning more about research. In this role I have worked with college instructors as well as community practitioners writing proposals, designing data collection tools, carrying out research projects, writing reports, and dealing with ethical concerns. I have also run research training workshops and I have been part of several research projects designed and carried out by practitioners. I have played a wide range of roles, from consultant to coordinator. I have built close and lasting relationships with the people I work with. I consider some of them my friends. These relationships have been characterized by what we call “permission to push” where there is an understanding that whenever there is questioning of each other’s ideas, it is done in the spirit of trying to better understand each other’s viewpoints through exploring assumptions and encouraging reflection. These conversations include explorations of what research is, what knowledge is, who is or can be a researcher as well as specific content oriented inquiries.

These experiences have given me an opportunity to think about collaborative research from a particular perspective. I am perceived as the “university

researcher” working with “community researchers”. The following description of my role was prepared by one team of practitioners for a proposal for funding for one research project. In this depiction, it is clear that they were relying on my skills and knowledge about research to support their experience as practitioners.

We are instructors who have worked together on volunteer committees, written curriculum and served on program development projects. Throughout the three years of the project, we will be trained in research methodology by Marina Niks, a PhD student from UBC. Marina will ensure that the research methods are rigorous and the findings valid.

Looking back at how I approached the role when I first started, I see now that I saw myself transferring to “the field” what I learned in university about how to do research. As I engaged in projects and reflected alone and with the practitioners on these experiences my assumptions regarding research, knowledge and university values were challenged. I had to rethink my beliefs and understandings.

Today I see myself facilitating the emergence of new ways of doing research by practitioners, questioning assumptions about how research “should” be done and by whom. I recognise that my academic training shapes how I approach research but I also believe it does not necessarily determine it. I believe that universities teach particular ways of doing research and that these are constructed by many as “the ways” to do research. People who have not been

trained to do research in academia do not traditionally feel capable of generating knowledge through research.

The following quotations come from two long-time adult literacy college instructors. We were discussing the possibility of including university professors in a project so that they could apply for a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant to compensate for a shortage in funding for the practitioners' research project.

If we can have academics do research to backup what we are saying, all the better.

If academics can make it look good... it's better for all of us. Research needs to be done, it doesn't matter who does it.

This conversation clarified a point I had not been able to articulate in previous conversations with practitioners. While they wanted academics to do research to validate what they already knew, they did not readily see the difference between academics doing the research or them doing it. I did see a difference. To me, it makes all the difference.

Today, when I meet a group of practitioners who are interested in learning about research, I start by having a conversation about research: What is research? Who is a researcher? My main goal is to make assumptions explicit and to generate a sense that everyone brings a different perspective to the generation and validation of knowledge through research. I understand that collaboration

creates spaces where these different perspectives can be articulated. Through a relationship based on trust and respect, researchers can explore ways in which these different perspectives can or cannot complement each other.

As I was getting involved in the literacy field as a research friend, I began collecting the data for my doctoral research. Although still looking at relationships between university trained researchers and community researchers, I wanted a different focus for my research. I was interested in talking to people who work as researchers in different locations. I wanted to talk to individuals who think of themselves as researchers even when they do not work in universities and even if they have not had academic research training. I assumed that they would have developed their own ways of doing research that might or might not be similar to the ways I had been trained to do research. I was interested in learning how these researchers worked together with university-based researchers. In the next section I state the research objectives and questions I posed for this inquiry.

### **Research objectives and questions**

The main objective of this research is to describe and better understand how university-based and non university-based researchers work together in collaborative research endeavours. In much the same way that cartographers need to visit the land to be able to draw accurate maps, I think there is a need to hear from those involved in collaborative research to understand the “topography” of collaborative relationships.

One of the contributions of this research is to provide a rich description of the collaborative relationships that researchers build and the issues that surface when they work together. In that sense, this research serves two purposes. First, it provides insight into the richness of collaborative approaches to research, showing the different ways of thinking about collaboration and the variety of relationships researchers establish when working with other researchers. Second, by describing the variety of relationships, it offers a starting point for other researchers to understand and reflect on the multiple aspects that influence collaboration and therefore the options they have when engaging in research with others. Ultimately, this research explores the notion that the collaboration a researcher establishes is in itself a choice that carries benefits as well as drawbacks.

Further, this research suggests that collaborative research has the potential to generate knowledge in ways that are different from traditional research models. This can happen only if collaborating researchers participate in the collaborative projects with a willingness to explore their own social location and their relative privileges and how these influence the knowledge that is generated in the project.

Specifically, I posed the following research questions:

1. What motivates researchers to engage in collaborative research between university-based and non university-based researchers?

2. How do researchers' understandings of research and of collaboration influence the relationships they establish and the research projects they develop?
  
3. What are the conditions that promote collaborative research as perceived by the participants?

### **Definition of terms**

Throughout this dissertation, I utilize terms that have been widely used and may refer to a variety of processes and concepts. In chapter two I explore different meanings that have been assigned to some of these terms. Here I provide a brief definition of the ways I use each term.

#### *Collaboration*

In this dissertation, collaboration refers to people working together. The term itself does not necessarily imply how they work together.

#### *Research*

I define research as being a systematic generation of knowledge that is shared. I explore the conception of research in greater detail in chapter six.

### *University researchers*

I use the term university researcher or university-based researcher to refer to those researchers who are part of university life as faculty or as students.

Although the work of those researchers who work, for example, in centres for excellence shares many characteristics with university-based researchers, they are not always employed or related to the university in the same way. Therefore they do not experience the same kinds of rewards and constraints that university-based researchers do.

### *Non-university researchers*

Non-university researchers are professionals working with the government, centres of excellence, professional unions, private companies, and grass roots organisations engaged in research as part of their jobs. Some of them are university-trained individuals, who, instead of pursuing university careers, have taken different professional paths. A large portion of the product of their work is distributed through research reports and other kinds of publications which often are the focus of attention of the media and of the workers and practitioners in different applied disciplines. Some of these researchers, especially those located in centres of excellence, also choose to write academic papers.

### *Academia/academic*

The term “academic” conjures different images for different people. Sue Jackson (2000), for example, examined how students in higher education constructed the notion of “academic”. She argues that notions of “academic” are clearly related to gender.

I had originally considered the use of the term academic to refer to university-based researchers. Dr. Gaalen Erickson warned me that the term was quite controversial and that many of the researchers who work in the workplace may be concerned about the use of the term. I am happy I listened to his advice.

I was so intrigued by the use of this term that I asked participants about their understandings of the term. I also asked if they considered themselves “academic.” Although the responses to this particular question were not used for the analysis presented in the following chapters, it did confirm that “academic” was not a useful descriptor. Some of the researchers working outside of universities flatly refused to be described with that term, regardless of their university training. Others with the same training and equal responsibilities in terms of research agreed they were “academics.” For some, being an academic referred to holding a position at a university. For others it described a particular training or occupation related to research.

I use the term academic to refer to activities and people related to or engaged with universities and university practices and standards. Some non-university researchers, for example, can engage in academic writing when they produce papers that can be published in scholarly journals.

### *Partnerships*

Partnership is another term that has become quite popular in the past decade. In this dissertation, “partnership” denotes formal relationships between two or more parties. The formality of the relationship may be represented by written documents such as research proposals that clearly describe the roles and responsibilities of each partner as well as the commitments of the partnership itself.

### **Overview**

Two themes run through this research: one more practical, the other more theoretical. The first argues that collaboration in research should be regarded as a methodological choice and as such should be evaluated to decide if that is the best approach for a particular study. This evaluation should involve an assessment of the goals of the project and of the conditions under which the project will be carried out. The second theme explores the idea of the potential of collaborative research between researchers based in different locations, arguing that it can become a meeting space for different standpoints. When researchers based in different locations and “cultures” collaborate in a project,

they can create a space where their perspectives can be made explicit and shared. I am not contending that collaboration necessarily implies a combination of the different perspectives. I am suggesting that it is in respectful sharing that a more complex understanding of the research endeavour can be developed. For the different perspectives to be articulated, a more inclusive understanding of research, one that is not bound by academic criteria, needs to be used. As a starting point I propose a strategy for talking about research that presents research as any systematic and rigorous endeavor that has the intent of generating new -or uncovering subjugated- knowledge and is shared.

This dissertation has six chapters. In chapter two I present two main arguments based on the literatures I review. First I explore the literature on collaboration and contend that there is an underlying notion in most of the literature that presents collaboration as an ideal state when conducting research. Researchers have to collaborate with subjects and researchers have to collaborate with other researchers. The idea of why it is “good” or “better” to do research collaboratively is not specifically questioned. The second argument is grounded in standpoint feminism and it contends that collaboration can become a space where different standpoints can be developed.

In three I describe how I collected and analysed the data. I explore the notion that this is a non-collaborative project done on collaborative research and point at challenges I faced as I did the study.

Chapters four and five contain the data analysis. In chapter four, I answer the first research question. I use the data to describe why researchers choose to collaborate, the various roles researchers play and the benefits and drawbacks researchers experience when collaborating with other researchers.

Chapter five deals with the last two research questions. I particularly look at the understandings researchers bring to the collaborations and how those influence their projects. I also describe institutional conditions and academic practices that participants perceive as being at odds with some of collaborative relationship requirements and with expectations from community based researchers.

In chapter six I review the research questions and highlight the findings of this study. I offer a strategy for talking about research that can be used as a starting point in critical analyses of notions of research collaborating researchers bring to the projects.

I am committed to opening the university to what some people within academia call the “outside world.” In a North American context, where professionals are mostly working for one institution, this broadening may look different than it does in other parts of the world. Collaborative research in this context has the potential to bring together researchers from various locations to contribute different perspectives to the study of social phenomena. The main argument I

propose is that current understandings of research prevent us from including, fostering and valuing others' ways of generating knowledge, thus limiting the potential for collaborative research. Research can and is being done by researchers both within and outside the university and also by university-trained and non university-trained researchers. The understanding of what research is and how it should be done needs to be re-defined and broadened to include a wide spectrum of ways of generating knowledge.

## **CHAPTER 2: Literature review**

*One can easily see that the new feminist analyses unsettle traditional assumptions about knowledge as they challenge familiar beliefs about women, men, and social life. How could it have been otherwise when our ways of knowing are such an important part of our way of participating in the social world? Sandra Harding, 1987, p. 189.*

Although a large portion of feminist analyses may not qualify as “new” anymore, they continue to unsettle well-established traditions in academia. This chapter builds from feminist standpoint theories to argue that collaborative research between university-based and non university-based researchers could be a space where different standpoints are included to develop a more complex understanding of social phenomena. There are, however, certain contextual factors that are required for this space to be generated. I argue that current academic structures and understandings do not foster the inclusion of a variety of standpoints and therefore the potential of collaborative research is not fully realized.

In the first part of this chapter I explore the literature on collaboration, arguing that the central concept is that of relationships. I contend that what some researchers have described as challenges in collaborative projects can be understood as indications of different ways of engaging in knowledge generation. I describe two contrasting examples of collaboration between university-based

and non university-based researchers. In the second part of the chapter I argue that standpoint feminism is a useful lens to understand the potential of collaborative research between university-based and non university-based researchers. I start by describing standpoint feminism, then turn to two examples of “other” ways of knowing. After that I analyse how current conditions do not foster the actualization of the potential of collaborative research. I finish the chapter with a look at the notion of fostering collaboration’s potential.

## **Collaborative research**

I have described elsewhere (Niks, 1995) that collaboration can be considered an umbrella term that, when used as an adjective, describes different processes all sharing one characteristic - that they are done by more than one person.

Regardless of the negative connotation it developed during the Second World War,<sup>1</sup> collaboration is currently a term that is generally perceived as a positive one. It refers to the possibility of people helping each other and learning from each other.

One challenge of reviewing the literature on collaborative research is that it is widely dispersed in a variety of literatures. Although there are articles that focus on the methodological approach itself (John-Steiner et al, 1998, Mountz et. al., 2003) many reflections regarding the use of collaborative research are embedded in discussions of the topic under study, making it hard to access in

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Collaborator’ and consequently ‘collaboration’ were terms reserved for those individuals who helped the Nazis by revealing where resistance soldiers or those persecuted were hiding.

searches of bodies of literature one is not familiar with. Here I draw from anthropological and feminist literatures as well as some references in other fields, such as nursing and teacher education.

A comparison of the subject index in the two editions of the Handbook of Qualitative Research (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, 2000) reveals the change of interest in collaboration in a matter of years. The 1994 Edition of the Handbook includes sporadic uses of the term collaboration, mainly used as synonym for participatory research or participatory action research.<sup>2</sup> The 2000 Edition, however, includes 4 subheadings for the subject of “Collaborative research” with 12 entries in total.

Calls for collaboration in research contend that collaboration can enhance research projects because community partners can facilitate access to informants and can also make sure the project is relevant to community needs. Ultimately the argument is based on an assumption that collaborative research bridges the gap between theory and practice (Johnston, 1990).

In research, ‘collaborative’ refers to more than one person being involved in the research process. Margaret Gibson (1985), for example, uses the dictionary definition to describe how her project was collaborative because people worked

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<sup>2</sup> The subject index shows one entry for collaboration, understood as participatory action research with encouragement for collaborative research coming from Marxism and feminism, one entry for collaborative inquiry; 2 entries for collaboration; and one entry for collaborative work.

together in a scientific undertaking. Some have even argued that all social science research is collaborative (Anderson, 1996; Gottlieb, 1995). The term, however, has generally been associated with non-traditional approaches to research. In this sense, collaborative approaches to research have emerged in response to traditional, positivistic approaches that called for a complete separation between the researcher and participants. Collaborative research, generally understood, acknowledges the participation of and looks to include non-traditional actors, including the participants themselves, in research. Within these understandings, it can be argued that participatory research and action research are forms of collaborative research. Susan Victor (1995), for example, argues that participatory research differs from action research in the degree of collaboration of participants.

Vera John-Steiner, Robert Weber and Michele Minnis (1998) argue that because the term has become so widely used, parameters need to be set to make it useful. They propose the following definition of collaboration:

The principles in a true collaboration represent complementary domains of expertise. As collaborators, they do not only plan, decide, and act jointly, they also *think together*, combining independent conceptual schemes to create original frameworks. Also, in a true collaboration, there is a commitment to shared resources, power, and talent: no individual's point of view dominates, authority for decisions and action resides in the group, and work products reflect a blending of all participants' contributions. (Minnis, John-Steiner, & Weber, 1994, p. C-2)

Although many people may agree with this definition as an ideal, there are also many examples of the challenges faced by collaborating researchers when attempting to put these ideals into practice. I suggest that these challenges can be understood as being an integral part of the development of relationships with individuals who are immersed in different socio-cultural and political situations. Indeed, when the collaborating partners share similar conditions these challenges do not seem to be as great. Gary Crow, Linda Levine and Nancy Nager (1992), for example, report that they tried to build collaborative relationships within their team of three university professors from different disciplines and between the team and students and advisors. They achieved a greater level of collaboration within the interdisciplinary team of professors than with students or advisors.

Most authors who write about collaborative research refer to similar themes: issues of time, power, flexibility and trust. These themes point at a definition of collaboration as a relational experience. In the next section I describe collaboration as essentially based on relationships and then turn to describe the challenges researchers describe.

### Centrality of relationships

Feminist researchers have long focused on relationships as the basis for knowledge generation. They argue that researchers build relationships with participants and with one another when involved in research. These

relationships profoundly influence the approach and therefore the results of a research project. Allison Tom and Carol Herbert (2002) point out that relationships between researchers and research participants are central to researchers' claims to knowledge. "Doing good qualitative research these days requires an engagement with both the ethical and the epistemological challenges of deliberately entering into relationships with other people to learn about them" (p. 591).

Feminist researchers especially have examined the relationships researchers build with research participants. Victor (1995), for example, after being involved in a participatory research project, came to "just" one conclusion, that in research she needs to be involved in reciprocal relationships. "Ultimately the relationship becomes the data" (p. 183). Gibson (1985) recommends that researchers establish relationships with school districts if they want to make their research more useful locally. It is through these relationships that collaborative research projects can be designed and carried out.

Using Nel Noddings' principles of fidelity and caring as a framework for understanding their research relationships with participants, Renate Schultz, Debra Schroeder and Celeste Brody (1997) argue, "each collaborative investigation is relational" (p. 481). With this statement they place relationships at the centre of collaborative research. They argue that the kind of relationships that are established, the level of trust specifically, has a great influence on the

quality of data that is gathered and shared. Although their focus is on collaborative research between university-based researchers and teachers, the argument is one that applies to other collaborations as well.

Another area where authors have focussed on relationships has been that of team research. Authors (Burgess et al., 1994; Crow et. al., 1992; Liggett et. Al, 1994; Olesen et. Al., 1994; Porter, 1994, Tom et. al., 1994) have described how the relationships established within a research team influence a research project. I have also argued before (Niks, 1995) that doing research as a team is not just doing individual research by a group of people. The team approach determines a different kind of research process where traditional research tasks occur in “collective” spaces and therefore relationships among team members are the basis upon which the project is built. I used the example of fieldnotes, arguably the most private as well as the most idiosyncratic form of analysis, to contend that research team meetings are the “fieldnotes” of team research, where team members exchange ideas and group analysis takes place.

When researchers establish relationships with other researchers they find that regardless of the best intentions, there are aspects of the practical, day to day work that make collaborative research a daring experience.

### A daring experience

Time is one of the themes most referred to by authors writing about collaborative experiences. Tom, Fingeret, Niks, Dawson, Dyer, Harper, Lee, Mc Cue and Morley (1994) describe the press of time as a challenge in collaborative research. Collaborative research takes more time than other types of research because discussing and looking for consensus on decisions by all partners takes time.

It takes more time from researchers; they are required to invest in negotiating research questions and analyses with a research team or with research participants. The time demands of collaboration can be unrealistic in the context of participants' and researchers' busy lives.  
(p. 41)

Some authors describe the challenges of completing collaborative projects on time. While Gibson (1985) describes the time she spent encouraging and training team members and reaching consensus, she also refers to the time she dedicated as a director of the project dealing with administrative matters. Tom et. al. (1994) also refer to what they call "role overload," the resulting challenge of extended responsibilities in terms of administrative and training tasks as well as general management in collaborative research.

Other authors discuss the disparity in the time community groups and academics spend in various research tasks (Strong-Boag, 1994; Wolf, 1996) pointing at that in some cases university-based researchers take longer to write proposals, do data analyses and write reports while community groups are pressured by the

need to find solutions to their problems (Greenwood and Levin, 2000, Hubbard, 1996).

Andrea Cornwall and Rachel Jewkes (1995) point that in projects which involve collaboration not everyone will be able to participate, not only because of interest but also because of time concerns. Participation in these kinds of projects is time consuming, they argue, and potential participants are busy earning a living and living their lives. This is a point echoed by other researchers (Mercier & Murphy, 1991; Tom, 1996; Tom et. al, 1994).

Mountz, Miyares, Wright and Bailey (2003) understand that time is just one aspect of the collaborative process that affects power relations in this type of research. Other factors include “sex, age, professional rank, language ability, institutional affiliation, job status, access to resources, time and manner of entry into the project, and research and life experience” (p. 32). Power has been recognized as such an important factor that collaboration has been described as the “deliberate and appropriate sharing of power” (Tom et al, 1994, p.2).

While acknowledging the tensions around time and power, most authors describe the need for trustful and flexible relationships to be developed to deal with potential conflicts. Schultz, Schroeder and Brody (1997) argue that trust is essential in the research relationships that are developed in collaborative research because the “quality of the relationship and trust between research

partners affects the quality of the information being shared” (p. 477). Some authors describe that when there is distrust among researchers problems arise that are hard to overcome (Barnsley, 1995; Strong-Boag, 1994).

Another aspect that most authors refer to when describing collaborative relationships is that of flexibility. Tom and Herbert (2002) argue that there is a need to discuss and even “champion flexible research designs as much as calling for more participatory methods so as to ensure that research benefits those who contribute to [the research]” (p. 602). Tom (1996) contends that a flexible research design allows researchers and participants to build collaborative relationships. Mountz, Miyares, Wright and Bailey (2003) reflect on how their project demanded that their research designs changed:

Our research questions changed easily, and we changed as individuals each on a journey of methodologically becoming something that we had not “been” when we began (p. 35).

Other researchers refer to the flexibility needed from individuals as they interact with others in collaboration. Laura Gitlin, Kevin Lyons and Ellen Kolodner (1994) argue that collaborating partners need “flexibility in thinking and work style, the ability to relinquish or take control in a group process, and an openness to others” (p. 22).

## Collaborative research between university-based and non university-based researchers

One relationship that has been under-examined in the literature has been that among researchers based in different institutions<sup>3</sup>. Collaboration among researchers based in the university is mostly analysed in the literature as team research (Crow, Levine and Nager, 1992; Liggett, Glesne, Johnston, Brody Hasazi and Schattman, 1994; Olesen, Droes, Hatton, Chico and Schatzman, L., 1994; Porter, 1994; Wasser and Bresler, 1996; Woods, Boyle, Jeffrey and Troman, 2000). This body of literature explores the challenges that surface when researchers need to negotiate ideas and activities with colleagues.

When university-based researchers work with researchers based in a different institution, especially a non-academic institution, the challenges that emerge are different than those that arise in collaborative relationships among peers in one type of institution such as universities. Values, demands and expectations are quite different in a university setting than in other organizations (Tom and Sork, 1994). These differences add a specific layer to the collaborative relationships between researchers located in different institutions. Researchers need to make shared project related decisions that can be suitable for organizations with different reward systems.

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<sup>3</sup> There is a large body of literature that focuses on the partnerships between universities and the for profit sector (see Currie and Newson, 1998; Newson, 1998, Polster, 1998). Although some of the issues that surface in those relationships are similar to the ones with the not for profit sector, the contextual factors are so different that I found that literature did not really contribute to the arguments I make in this dissertation.

Barbara Cottrell, Stella Lord, Lise Martin and Susan Prentice (1996) argue that institutional and contextual differences have the most significant effect on collaborative relationships.

These differences between how community groups operate and how universities operate are not neutral: they are shaped by power relations and power differences which must be named, recognized and dealt with before a successful partnership relationship can be established. (p. 102)

The authors point out that many researchers do not have experience building partnerships and negotiating different reward systems. This lack of experience added to the institutional and contextual factors can result in failed experiences.

Kathryn Church, Nina Bascia and Eric Shragge (forthcoming) reflect on their experience trying to be relevant and credible both to community groups as well as to a national academic research community. They started by acknowledging that there was a potential for conflict between the different groups they were trying to address and determined different ways in which they could work to address the challenge. They used three strategies to work through structural separations between the academics in their group and several community partners. They first decided to meet outside of the university, which they reflect was crucial in allowing them to feel like a group and think beyond institutional frames. Second, they set clear limits on the impact that the larger project would have on their group, restricting, for example, the inclusion of others in the group.

Third, they took advantage of and acknowledged informal spaces like phone conversations, and email exchanges minimizing the time they needed to meet face to face while at the same time valuing the time and attention they needed to pay to the collaborative process.

Jan Barnsley (1995) and Veronica Strong-Boag (1994) both reflect on one project they were involved in. In late 1991, the centre for Women's Studies at the University of British Columbia called a meeting to discuss the possibility of applying to the Family Violence and Violence Against Women Research Centres program. This was a joint program from the Social Sciences and Humanities Council and the federal Family Violence Prevention Division of Health and Welfare Canada. Although the community activists were a bit sceptical because the call for proposals "sounded pretty academic and traditional" (Barnsley, 1995, p. 191) they decided to attend the meeting. During the meeting there was agreement about the proposed centre to be based on feminist principles and be housed in the community, which implied that the funds would be channelled to the community to support their work. A group composed of university-based researchers, community activists, and front line workers applied and was awarded the funds to develop the centre. Both authors agree that differences soon surfaced. Outside factors, and requirements by the funding agency<sup>4</sup> generated a sense of mistrust and hostility between academics and community activists. Some internal sources of conflict were inequalities in terms of how the

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<sup>4</sup> Two of the examples given are the cuts to funding for women's groups while funding was given to five research centres and limitations by the funding agency to pay investigators.

academic researchers' privilege was perceived by community activists and by the university researchers.

As feminists we have made substantial gains in the university but we are still often only marginal to the institution. In general, however, and for understandable reasons, it was the relative privilege of their academic partners which was most noted by the community. That perception, which emphasized the differences among partners, made cooperation all the harder and misunderstanding all the more likely (Strong-Boag, 1994, p. 7).

In the end, communication became so difficult that at a meeting with an outside facilitator, it became obvious that they could not reach an agreement and the activists withdrew from the project. The academics later found other partners and continued their work with the centre.

Based on these experiences Barnsley, (1995) and Strong-Boag (1994) are sceptical about partnerships between academically located researchers and community-based researchers. They both assert that differences are not easily bridged. However they agree that in some cases these collaborations can work. Strong-Boag argues that partnerships "need to be nourished over time and not produced solely in response to external stimuli" (p. 11) as well as that great care should be dedicated to the selection of partners. Barnsley believes that an essential element to consider is the nature of the initiation of the partnership; who decides a partnership is an appropriate strategy and why this is considered a good approach. She suggests a set of questions that can guide the decision to

enter a partnership: Who has the power and privilege? How will it be exercised? What are the rules? What do we need in order to be equal participants? How will the process have to be changed so that participation is real and not just theoretical? What impact will participating in the partnership have on our own organization? and How will we maintain our right to speak out publicly on the issues – even, sometimes, against our partners? (p. 212)

The accounts by Barnsley (1995) and Strong-Boag (1994) are uncommon not only because they reflect on collaborative research among academically located researchers and community activists, but for the tone of their reflections. They describe their experience with great honesty and ponder the complex issues that come into play in this particular set of relationships. They consider outside influences, such as funding requirements of the program, that influenced their project as well as issues of communication and privilege.

Ultimately, these descriptions illustrate that collaboration in research can be understood by some as an attempt to combine different understandings into one.

This need to blend different perspectives can create great tensions.

The collaborative method of research forces a conflict between two perspectives, the academic reality and the reality of lived experience... [as] researchers and activists often have different goals and objectives. Their opinion[s] about how things should be done or what needs to be done vary greatly at times (Statham and Rhoades, 1999, p. 22 quoting an interview with a poverty leader).

The notion that it is a good idea to blend differences is one that Barnsley (1995) is very uncomfortable with. She argues that in some situations it is not even desirable to negotiate research understandings because it would imply compromising essential beliefs. Barnsley contends that the partnership trend could be signalling that community knowledge needs to be validated by the academy to be considered worthwhile and that this could imply a cooptation of community knowledge by the academy.

[P]erhaps the most insidious aspect of this new partnership rhetoric is the assumption (indeed, the requirement) that we find common ground in spite of extremely divergent political analyses and interests, and that we agree on solutions. The process of trying to reach such agreement may kill us (p. 201).

Partnerships, according to Barnsley (1995), are a strategy designed to share the knowledge generated in academia with communities, not necessarily to build knowledge together. She argues that this perspective implies that only universities define what knowledge is and how it should be generated.

Amanda Boggan and Shauna Butterwick (2004) present a more optimistic and equally honest description of their collaborative work. Their chapter is presented as a dialogue between the two, giving the reader a sense of the kind of collaboration they established. Theirs is an ongoing, long-term relationship not bound by a particular project with requirements from funding agencies. In this

dialogue each author acknowledges her institutional and geographic location. Butterwick recognizes her privilege as a university professor and describes the different roles she has played in the relationship. Boggan reflects on how she has been seen as a “category.” Both recount the experience of doing a shared presentation at a conference where Butterwick was regarded as the presenter and Boggan as a “subject.”

Audiences often saw Amanda as ‘representing’ poor women; she was often the only individual on low income in the room, telling her story; while others, academics and researchers from other agencies were the audience. Few, if any, in the audience, had had experiences where they would be speaking of their lives as middle- and upper-class individuals to a group on low income. Amanda was frequently not heard, her story translated by those present into something that would fit their framework. (Boggan and Butterwick, 2004, p.17)

Boggan and Butterwick’s chapter presents an alternative to collaborative research between university-based and non university-based researchers. As each one acknowledges her own location and in an honest and respectful dialogue learns about the differences in their experiences and perspectives, they develop their own, and maybe a shared, perspective. Essentially, both recognize the other as a knower and the dialogue between the two presents a complex perspective of the situation of single mothers on welfare. Theirs is an example of how collaboration can become a space where different perspectives develop and draw from one another. In the next section of this chapter, I turn to feminist

theories to frame a discussion of the potential of collaboration to foster the development of standpoints and dialogue.

## **Standpoint feminism**

Standpoint theory originally developed in the 1970's and 80's as a "feminist critical theory about relations between the production of knowledge and practices of power" (Harding, 2004, p. 1). Standpoint theorists argue that epistemologies are based on the material lives of knowers and consequently are influenced by the conditions that surround knowers.

Dorothy Smith (1987) claims that the tools of knowledge generation had become part of the structures of domination. She especially examines how sociology is produced with no connections to the experiences of those the discipline is supposed to be studying and therefore maintains the capitalist and patriarchal relations of ruling. Smith proposes and outlines a theory of the everyday where the starting point is the personal lives of women and minority groups. These local experiences are framed within the larger relations of domination.

Standpoint theorists argue that starting from women's everyday life experiences results in a more truthful and comprehensive account of social relations (Harding, 1993, 2004). These everyday experiences are shaped by the conditions under which the women live. Nancy Hartsock (1998) contends that historical and material conditions structure women's experience of the world. For her, the

similarities among women's experiences and their differences from men's experiences can be explained as manifestations of the institutionalized sexual division of labour. Hartsock (2004) claims that some knowledge should be privileged over other knowledge for ethical and political reasons. Her goal is to find ways to use theoretical tools to create theories of social justice that can support social change. In that regard, she wants to privilege "the knowledge that offers possibilities for more just social relations and she sees this happening as groups of individuals transform into resistant, oppositional, and collective subjects" (Hartsock, 2004, p. 245).

There are three principles of standpoint theories that I have found useful for the analysis of collaborative research. First, by highlighting the significance of experience as a starting point for any knowledge of social life, standpoint theories offer a way of recognizing different contributions to knowledge generation both in terms of content and in terms of how the knowledge is generated. Questioning the method of generating knowledge is at the centre of the arguments in this dissertation: who is part of the process of knowledge generation and how knowledge is generated are critical. Second, although recognizing the influence of material conditions, standpoint theorists argue that standpoints are not a given, they are a potential that needs to be developed through theoretical and practical work and socio-political engagement (Harding, 1993; Hartsock, 1998). The development of standpoints includes individual as well as collective reflection on personal and collective experiences and knowledge. Collaborative

research can be a good arena for developing knowledge through individual reflections as well as through conversations with others. Third, standpoint theories call for the need to include others' perspectives to gain a more complex understanding of the world. Collaborative projects that include researchers immersed in different situations can become a place where the different standpoints are articulated. This is especially so when those collaborating can reflect on their own relative privilege and power and how these influence their knowledge and how they produce knowledge.

Standpoint theory locates investigators on the same plane as the investigated, bringing their social, political, racial, economic, and sexual situations – the power and privilege that naturalise hierarchical arrangements – as much into critical focus as traditional 'objects of knowledge' (Code 2000, p. 461)

I am not implying that all research should be collaborative, or that collaborative research has the potential to combine different standpoints. In fact, I do not believe that combining different standpoints is always a desirable outcome. I am arguing that collaborative research offers a space for different standpoints to develop and for dialogue among people with different standpoints to be established. What I am pointing at is a potential that requires certain conditions to be fulfilled. In the next section I explore the suitability of academic settings to be supporting these collaborative research processes.

## **Academia and collaborative research**

There are certain conditions that need to be in place for collaboration to realize the potential described above. In this section I explore some of them. The first condition would imply the acceptance, or better yet, the invitation, of a variety of viewpoints into academic arenas. I start by describing two works that depict excluded viewpoints. I then explore what researchers have described as ways academic practices and structures challenge collaborative practices in order to represent the struggle that entails for academically based researchers to engage in collaborative research. By pointing at and describing some of the challenges, this section also illustrates some of the changes that would need to occur for academia to be seen as supporting collaborative research.

### Excluded standpoints

Rauna Kuokkanen (forthcoming) describes the academy as characterized by “epistemic ignorance” in that academic practices exclude epistemic and intellectual traditions that are not dominant. One example of these excluded epistemes are indigenous ways of knowing. Kuokannen (forthcoming) defines an episteme as a taken for granted lens through which we see the world. In my understanding, the development of a standpoint would include a reflection on one’s episteme and the conditions under which this episteme has developed and is sustained.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) claims that traditional understandings of research privilege one way of knowing over others that are not recognized as generating valid knowledge. In her book, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*, research is presented as a western colonizing tool. Through this lens, research is a cultural construct situated within a historical, political and cultural context and not a neutral tool.

Research is one of the ways in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism is both regulated and realized. It is regulated through the formal rules of individual scholarly disciplines and scientific paradigms, and the institutions that support them (including the state). It is realized in a myriad of representations and ideological constructions of the Other in scholarly and 'popular' works, and in the principles which help to select and recontextualize those constructions in such things as the media, official stories and school curricula. ... In a very real sense, research has been an encounter between the West and the Other (Smith, 1999, p. 7-8).

Smith (1999) takes the readers through centuries of Western colonization of indigenous peoples to illustrate how research was used to define, represent, and even trade the "other." Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world were disregarded in favour of Western ways of knowing represented in research. One example Smith offers is the way the West understands ethics in research. Traditionally, researchers negotiate consent with individuals. Indigenous research ethics, however, extend beyond individual consent and confidentiality and refer to aspects Western research does not include when dealing with ethics

in research such as respect for other individuals, respect among peoples, and respect for the environment.

Another interesting example of “other” ways of knowing is teacher research. Over ten years ago Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle (1993) argued that teachers were not regarded as the “knowers” about “how they know.” Teachers, according to the authors, were valued for the knowledge about teaching and learning they bring to the collaboration but not for their “way of knowing.” In this sense, teachers’ ways of knowing were mediated through academically located researchers’ perspectives.

The past decade has seen what authors call a renewal of interest in teacher research (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999; Viadero, 2002). Communities of teacher researchers have been operating at local, provincial and national levels. National and international teacher research conferences are held where teacher researchers can present their work and exchange ideas with peers. The American Educational Research Association, the primary membership organization for education researchers, has a subdivision devoted to teacher research.

Teacher research is understood as a professional development opportunity to improve classroom practices (Hansen 1997; Hubbard & Power, 1997) and also as a key resource for teachers and teacher educators and knowledge that can

inform policy and practice (Clarke and Erickson, 2003, MacLean and Mohr, 1999; Northfield, 1996). Indeed, Anthony Clarke and Gaalen Erickson (2003) argue that teacher research can be regarded as one defining feature of teaching as professional practice.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) characterize teacher research as a movement with five major trends: (a) the significance placed on teacher research in teacher education, professional development, and school reform; (b) the development of conceptual frameworks and theories of teacher research; (c) the dissemination of teacher research beyond individual schools and local groups; (d) the incipient emergence of a critique of the teacher research movement; and (e) potential for teacher research to transform some aspects of university culture. These five elements point at an increasing awareness of teacher research as a unique way of knowing that should be considered different from traditional forms of knowledge (Northfield, 1996).

The literature presents a picture of teacher research as increasingly valued by academic circles. For example, the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia and the British Columbia Teachers Federation organize an annual conference, *Investigating Our Practices*, where teachers are invited to present their projects.

Indigenous ways of knowing and teacher research present two examples of knowledge developed outside of academic institutions. Although there is evidence in the literature and in current practices that the academy is very slowly acknowledging these other ways of knowing, they are still regarded as marginal. The challenge, in terms of collaborative research, is to generate spaces where individuals with different ways of knowing can enter a genuine dialogue in which the differences are acknowledged and valued.

Including different ways of knowing is not an easy task. I contend that unless there is an awareness of and respect for different standpoints, collaborative research does not fulfill its potential of generating dialogue between different standpoints. Smith's (1999) analyses make a compelling argument for researchers involved in collaborative research to reflect on and share their understandings of knowledge and examine how these are influenced by the context within which they are working. Definitions of research and knowledge cannot be taken for granted if researchers truly want to engage in sharing the process of generating knowledge with other researchers who may have a different way of knowing.

An examination of the literature on collaborative research reveals that researchers, especially those working in the university, have found that academic practices are not always in harmony with the demands of collaborative work.

Researchers have examined at least four interconnected aspects of academic culture that they have found problematic when doing collaborative work: emphasis on individual achievement, evaluation practices, focus on funding, and negligence of the obligation to best serve society.

#### Emphasis on individual achievement

The emphasis of collaboration is to work with others; individual expectations and rewards are negotiated so that the collaboration can be successful. Academic culture, in contrast, is mostly based on individual work, achievements and rewards. Sandra Acker and Carmen Armenti (2004) explored how women experience life within academic institutions and found significant tensions between institutionalized career paths and specific individual situations, especially those of young women with children. The tenure competition as well as other evaluations for promotion were reported as a source of anxiety and stress, a “tormenting ritual that seems to have gone out of control” (p. 19), affecting the well being of the women. These processes were perceived as a constant scrutiny of their performances, placing “great pressures on *individuals* to ‘perform’” (p. 12). This emphasis on individual achievements exacerbated the isolation that women feel.

The need to produce individual “products” puts academically based researchers who want to collaborate with community researchers at a disadvantage. This

emphasis on the individual could also collide with other ways of knowing that place an emphasis on the collective.

### Evaluation practices

Diane Wolf (1996) argues that feminist researchers have not engaged in much research with women because challenging power inequalities in research is hard to do without changing the research methods. For university-based researchers, to engage in research with women would imply a confrontation with and challenge of the structures of academia, “how products are judged acceptable and by whom, how progress is viewed, how ‘theory’ is understood, how Ph.D.s are awarded, how tenure is granted, and how women’s studies is regarded” (p.3). Wolf recognizes that this is one of the dilemmas feminist researchers encounter when they do fieldwork (1996). She acknowledges the “cost” and the penalty of doing research that includes participatory components, since it does not translate easily into the degrees or promotions researchers seek within the academy.

Francesca Cancian (1993) also refers to the challenges that academics face when doing research with community groups while trying to advance their academic careers. She points at aspects of community work that are not valued in the university, such as multiple authorship and negotiating research agendas.

Many authors refer to the tenure competition as an example of the obstacles academically located researchers confront when trying to do research with community groups. Amy Hubbard (1996), for example, presents her own experience as a junior university researcher trying to understand the reward

system. While she was working with members of her department on formulating faculty workload and leave policies, the group decided they should reward teaching and research as well as those faculty who reach a wider audience among the general public.

However, even as we were writing these new standards, my senior colleagues warned me that as a junior faculty member I should concentrate on research above all. No matter what my department put on paper as appropriate standards, I would have to be acceptable to the university rank and tenure committee and they were likely to be most concerned about the depth and breadth and scholarliness of my research (p. 9).

### Focus on funding

The “partnership trend” (Barnsley, 1995; Cottrell et al, 1996) has been characterized by a call from funding agencies for university researchers to find community groups that would engage in joint research. Katherine Scott (2003) describes these changes in funding policies, arguing that “recent trends in funding appear to have threatened the continued viability of the [social development] sector”(p.2). In particular, Scott describes a shift from a core-funding model to a project based one, a reluctance to fund infrastructure such as administrative costs, an increase in report requirements and the requirement to form partnerships before submitting funding applications. Furthermore, Scott argues, funders are gaining more control over what non-profit organizations do and do not do. These new funding strategies leave non-profit organizations

devoting valuable resources to accessing short-term funding, sometimes at the expense of the organization core activities.

Several authors have analysed the relationships between universities and society by studying the changing nature of the funding processes. They argue that current cutbacks to universities have put pressures on staff to generate income for the institution.<sup>5</sup> The relationships between funding agencies and universities have deep implications for the approaches, the topics, and the researchers that are funded.

Julianne Cheek (2000) explores the issues around doing funded qualitative research. Because universities seek to hire faculty who have experience and have been successful in securing research funding, access to funding becomes an important criterion in hiring and promotion. “The ability to secure funding and the amounts researchers have secured have become indicators of something they were never intended to signify, making the pursuit of funds an end in itself rather than the means to an end, as it was always intended to be” (Cheek, 2000, p. 417). As certain approaches to research and particular topics have better chances of accessing funding, researchers are drawn to particular areas and methods of research. Some authors have mainly focused on the influence funding agencies have on university research agendas (Cheek, 2000, Parahoo,

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<sup>5</sup> Some authors (Harman & Sherwell, 2002) consider that one of the consequences of the cuts in funding has been increasing partnerships between university and industry. Others argue that the rising number of partnerships between university and the for profit sector are also related to movements and demands emerging within the university (Newson, 1998; Polster, 1998).

1991, Porter, 1997). I would argue that the influence could be also understood as reciprocal. On the one hand funding agencies heavily influence the research agenda for universities. On the other, funding bodies have many university professors on their boards making decisions about what research to fund. This could mean that the same individuals are shaping the research policies in universities and funding bodies.

These arguments point at aspects of the reward system in universities that influence the ability of researchers to do research with communities. As Sam Porter (1997) notes, researchers are pressured to “tailor their work in order to meet the requirements of funders” (p. 655). If funding agencies develop programmes to fund research with communities, researchers will choose to engage in these kinds of research. In Canada, funding agencies such as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) have increasingly required the formation of partnerships to access certain research funds. By setting these requirements, the agencies are not only encouraging researchers to find suitable candidates and create research partnerships, they are also putting pressure on researchers to do research using a particular approach. On the one hand, these requirements create opportunities for university-based researchers to do work with communities. On the other, they lure researchers who may not be as interested in collaborative research as in the possibility of accessing funds and consequently improving their promotion opportunities (Barnsley, 1995).

### Neglecting the obligation to best serve society

Feminist authors have explored the tension between academic work and activism when reflecting on the role of Women's Studies. Women's Studies programs were created in many universities in North America to transform higher education institutions and break down the academic-community divides that perpetuated gender, class and other discriminations (Orr, 1999). In spite of those initial ideals, Women's Studies programs had to maintain the separation of their scholarly and outreach functions to develop a legitimate place within the academy (Orr, 1999; Krajewski, 1999). Orr (1999) cites from an interview with Anne Truax, the Director of the Women's Centre at the University Women's Liberation (UWL) of the Minnesota campus to describe the motives behind this decision. "So we were trying to make sure that women's studies was so *darned* pure that nobody could doubt for a minute that it wasn't scholarly and worth pursuing" (in Orr, 1999, p. 2). As feminist discourses and methodologies have become part of academic life, feminist researchers have re-examined the separation between their conceptual work and their practice. Several authors (Haney, 1999; Fernandez, 1999; Orr, 1999) argue that it is essential for Women's Studies programs to include an activist component.

[A]n academic women's studies program with no activism component conveys the idea that feminism is only about ideas, not about *working* with those ideas (Haney, 1999, p.11).

The critique of academic structures and practices is not exclusive to feminist authors. In the past decade, there has been a considerable increase in the examination of academic practices. A comparative review of the subject index in the two editions of the Handbook of Qualitative Research (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, 2000) can illuminate the increasing interest in the study of the academy. The 1994 Edition does not show any entries for the subjects “academy” or “academic.” The subject “university” shows several entries, all of them for specific universities (p. 632). These refer to specific projects carried out by the universities. The 2000 Edition of the handbook, however, shows 6 subheadings under academia/academics and includes one article that explores universities’ mandates and their potential to support research with participatory components (Greenwood and Levin, 2000) and another that examines the issues surrounding funded research (Cheek, 2000). The subject “universities” includes 10 subheadings including “power relations and universities,” and “action research and universities.” This edition includes only one entry for a specific university, the University of Chicago. These are examples of the shift in interest in the study of academic structures and the topics researchers are concentrating on.

Davydd Greenwood and Morten Levin (2000) argue in favour of structural changes in universities. They argue that universities have become dissociated from their main role, service to society. Universities are defined as autopoietic organizations.

[Autopoietic refers to the] self-referential and self-generating character of a social situation in which a narrow group of socially interdependent individuals generate standards for each other and judge each other's performance without regard to their contextualization within the interests of society at large (p.104).

As an example of how universities have imposed barriers to working with society, Greenwood and Levin discuss the peer review process as one of the professional structures built into most academic mechanisms that serve the perpetuation of the system<sup>6</sup>. As an alternative, they suggest the inclusion of external stakeholders as an integral part of the evaluation processes.

#### The challenges of combining two worlds

What the above authors share is a notion that academic practices do not encourage the work of university researchers with community groups. Practices that reward particular kinds of achievements encourage researchers to carry out individual research projects that do not necessarily serve or establish connections with any community group.

Some authors (Cancian, 1996; Stoecker, 1996) refer to two different worlds, academia and community, outlining some of their differences, for example different deadlines and writing styles. Academics who want to engage in collaborative research with community groups are torn by two different worlds

with very different institutional reward systems. Francesca Cancian defines activist research.

[Activist research] promotes social change, explores inequalities and it is for powerless groups. Academically based research, on the other hand, aims at increasing knowledge about questions that are theoretically or socially significant. Therefore sociologists who do activist research and want a successful academic career have to bridge 'two conflicting social worlds' (1996, p. 92).

Cancian argues that it is hard for academics who want to combine both worlds to engage in participatory research or other non-traditional approaches to research because these are "so strongly oriented to the community that it is difficult for researchers to maintain adequate ties to academia and have successful careers" (p. 94). She believes it is possible for university-based researchers to do participatory research if they plan these projects so that they serve multiple goals, oriented to both the community and academia with "research that uses some elements of participatory research [that] can be integrated with an academic career" (1993, p. 94).

Randy Stoecker criticizes sociologists for "adopting hierarchical, exclusionary modes of gathering and distributing knowledge" (1996, p. 1). Academics are trapped, he argues, because they work in a status quo structure and have to

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<sup>6</sup> The Social Sciences and Humanities Council describes peer review as the universally recognized, "most objective and effective way to allocate public research funds." ([http://www.sshrc.ca/web/about/about\\_e.asp](http://www.sshrc.ca/web/about/about_e.asp), August, 31, 2004)

abide by its rules and regulations and at the same time they are supposed to be generating progressive ideas. He presents a look at individuals trying to cope with the division between academia and the world and poses three models for sociologists to deal with the tension between academia and social action: the participant who is a professor during the day and an activist in the evening and on weekends; the advocate who speaks for a group they are not a member of and not accountable to; and the participatory researcher who seeks to democratize knowledge production and process and uses research for social change. Stoecker (1996) describes the benefits and drawbacks of each of these models. The participant professor lives split lives where the teaching is removed from the activist activities. This split leads to “status inconsistencies” (p. 7) whereby the activist challenges the status quo and the academic sustains it. The advocate model is also problematic because it still maintains the distance between academic and activist. The participatory research model “improves the ability of those excluded from participation in society and the realization of its benefits to participate” (p.8). It is clear Stoecker favours this last model, arguing that its only danger is to make academics irrelevant.

Stoecker (1999) also describes the various roles an academic can play in terms of his/her role in participatory research projects. Keeping in mind the goal of democratizing the knowledge process, the university-based researcher can assume different roles depending on the level of organization of the community group. A community group that is highly organized, such as a union, for

example, may not need much more than the researcher's technical skills in advising on a research design. A less organized and less resourced community, in contrast, may come to the academic for help to do research but may also need other skills.

Al Gedicks (1996) raises the issue of the demands on one's life of working with community groups on top of doing academic work.

My ability to survive as an activist sociologist at UW-La Crosse has not been without its costs, however. I spend an enormous amount of time and energy keeping in touch with a grassroots movement and providing assistance where my expertise is most needed. It is a second career in addition to my academic career. At one point I had hoped to combine this with a family and kids, but not anymore. I don't see how I could find the time to do a good job in all these areas (p13).

Not all authors describe an incompatibility between university practices and their community work. Sandra Krajewski (1999) describes how her work doing research for communities helped her publish and achieve full professorship. She explains that this was possible because she was working within the Department of Women's Studies, rather than a program of Women's Studies. This status allowed her work to be judged by her peers in the department using Women's Studies values which focus on commitment to community needs.

While recognizing the shortcoming of the academic structures, some authors (Smith, 1999; Stoeker, 1997) have also also recognized that some spaces are opening up in the academy.

Significant spaces have been opened up within the academy and within some disciplines to talk more creatively about research with particular groups and communities – women, the economically oppressed, ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples (Smith, 1999, p. 9).

Ultimately, the academy is the result of what those working in it produce. The fact that most of the authors referred to in this review are located in the academy is testament to the different forces at play in academic circles and provides a sense of hope of changes to come.

### **Fostering dialogue among standpoints**

I started this chapter with a description of how collaboration has been constructed in the literature with an emphasis on relationships built on trust, respect and flexibility. I then acknowledged that these descriptions can be hard to put into practice. I went on to suggest that collaboration can become a space where different standpoints can develop, and looked at how researchers have described academic demands as being at odds with collaborative research practices. Throughout the chapter, I pointed out that there are certain conditions that are required for collaboration to become a space where critical reflection and political engagement foster the development of knowledge. In this last section I

discuss conditions that can foster collaborative research. I examine what researchers report is a need for a critical understanding of research.

Researchers who have tried to work with groups of researchers developing “other” ways of knowing recognize the difficulty of defining what research is. Mainstream understandings of knowledge and research, represented by funding and publishing requirements, exclude non-traditional ways of knowing (Kuokannen, forthcoming). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) argue that teacher research should not be compared to university research. They still want to claim that what teachers do is research. The authors propose a working definition for teacher research that is not bound by academic criteria. Teacher research is a *systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work* which has been made accessible to different people over time (p. 5).

Margaret Herrington (2003) had to deal with the elusiveness of a definition of research when working on a report entitled “‘Difficult to Reach’ Research”. When asking Research and Practice in Adult Literacy (RAPAL) members to send information about non-traditional research they had been involved with, she needed to include some criteria. She explained the difficulty of this task:

RAPAL has always challenged traditional research narratives with uncomfortable questions about knowledge generation and power. Research can be seen as social practice rather than as technology (a context free set of methods and procedures); it is rooted in traditions and

reflects power distribution. We cannot see the ranking of forms of knowledge as unconnected to the social order. Views about 'acceptable research' are shaped and governed by those with power and influence in the knowledge generation industry (p. 6).

The difficulties these authors have found can be understood as the struggle of developing knowledge on the margins. In the Western world, the academy has been constructed as the institution where knowledge is "produced" and which at the same time defines what knowledge is. Kuokannen (forthcoming) argues that the academy has the responsibility to take a critical look at its role in the exclusion of other than dominant worldviews. She calls for the academy to become a hospitable place for non-dominant epistemes. This hospitality implies an unconditional welcome of "the other," not only accepting but also wanting to learn from other perspectives. Kuokannen acknowledges that this may take some unlearning. Although she suggests general notions of what the changes should be, Kuokannen refuses to offer a set of solutions because she believes that these changes should be developed collectively and over time, deconstructing practices and engaging in dismantling the "Master's house."

I believe that the major changes suggested above would need to be developed gradually and would require changes in how individuals and institutions regard themselves as knowers, acknowledging that each particular socio-historical circumstance influences how individuals see and know the world. In other words, this shift would entail an understanding that there are multiple ways of making

sense and knowing the world. Knowledge is always partial, but it is much more limited if there is no acknowledgement of that partiality and if partners' knowledge is dismissed.

In the next chapters I describe how the researchers in my study understand collaboration. Most of these researchers, both inside and outside the university, understand that theirs is one way of understanding reality and are willing to engage with others in exploring each other's perspectives. Although there are still many criticisms of academic structures, there are also many references to how university-based researchers are genuinely interested in working with community groups.

### **CHAPTER 3: Methods**

This chapter focuses on how I collected and analyzed the data to answer my research questions. I present these descriptions with a full awareness of, using Andrea Fontana and James Frey's (2000) words, how "the techniques used, and the ways of recording information, all come to bear on the results of the study" (p. 660). Therefore this chapter is more than an enumeration of the specific data collection and analysis techniques but is also a discussion of the issues that framed and shaped the research process.

The location of the speaker is always epistemically significant (Alcoff, 1991). In the introduction to this dissertation I described how I decided to research this topic, and in doing that, I connected myself, my assumptions and background to the project. To avoid repetition, and to escape what may otherwise be perceived as self-centeredness, "soul searching" (Harding, 1987) or plain overdoing it (Fontana and Frey, 2000), I do not go over who I am and what I bring to this research here again. In recognizing the tremendous influence a researcher has on the process and findings, especially if unspoken (Fontana and Frey, 2000), I do, though, explore in this chapter how I may have influenced the research process.

## **Gathering data**

To answer the research questions, I needed to explore and understand how researchers both in and outside the academy made sense of their involvement in collaborative research. I had to find out about their research practices, ideologies and relationships with other researchers. I also needed to find out who had been involved in collaborative research projects involving both academic and non-academically located researchers and explore how they managed or did not manage to bring academic and community values and practices to the research activities. I assessed the different options I had to collect data. Using an ethnographic approach I could do a case study of a collaborative project. The benefit of this option would be that I would be able to see and document interactions as they happened, and to interview participants about their current thoughts, pressures, hopes and disillusion. Looking at one single project would have allowed me to explore collaborative relationships in depth. This would have been a useful approach but it would have limited the study to that case and those involved. Also, the area of collaborative research was relatively new to the literature, with quite a few accounts and descriptions of specific collaborations, but little mapping of what is happening in the social sciences. On a more practical matter, I was pregnant at the time and it was hard to find a project in which I could participate and do the interviews before going into labour.

The second option I considered was interviewing researchers associated with a small set of research projects. By doing this, I would be able to describe a few projects and understand how different researchers felt within them. I would then be able to compare collaborative structures and experiences. As I started to look for projects I found that they were very difficult to find. What was becoming really interesting were the collaborative relationships themselves. I was most interested in what kinds of relationships are established and in what areas, who participated, who did not participate, and how participation was defined and practiced. I realized then that the major contribution of my dissertation would be to describe some of the places where university and non-university researchers do work together.

Thus, encountering a challenge led me to a new formulation of my research question and, subsequently, of the data collection strategies. I realized that looking for collaborative research projects that involved university-based and non university-based researchers was already part of my data collection. By designing the study to include participants from multiple areas of practice I could bring a wider lens to the project. I therefore decided to use interviews to gather data about previous experiences as well as the interviewees' reflections about those experiences. I interviewed researchers who had been involved in collaborative research between university-based and non university-based researchers. Interviewing was a well-suited data collection strategy for me as I have conducted many research interviews before and feel it is a strategy I can manage skillfully.

One of the characteristics of this project is that it focuses on a research method. In this way it becomes research about research. Therefore, the whole dissertation becomes a methods chapter. Another peculiarity of this project is that it looks at collaborative research in a non-collaborative way. One could expect that a researcher would design a collaborative project or study the collaborative aspect of a larger project. In this case, however, I do not make any claims for collaboration. Except for the close collaboration with my supervisor - a relationship that makes, at least at one level, all graduate students' research collaborative - I designed this project, I collected the data, I analysed it and, finally, I wrote this dissertation. Although some authors would argue that all research is collaborative, or should be, in terms of acknowledging participants' contributions, I recognize that this was not a collaborative effort. In this study I use the individual researcher framework to look at others who engage in collaborative research. This approach is consistent with the argument I make in this dissertation that collaboration is a methodological choice. In this case, the individual researcher approach is useful to understanding the collaborative method.

## **Interviews**

I conducted twelve unstructured in-depth interviews with researchers selected for their different organizational location. Most of the descriptions of collaborative research in the literature come from researchers based in university settings.

The goal of this research was to capture other perspectives. To gather data from people from various kinds of backgrounds and interests, I sought out researchers working in different non university-based associations.

In trying to get some insight into whom to interview, I talked to Dr. Shauna Butterwick, a committee member who has extensive experience working with community groups. Based on her suggestions, I produced a list of institutions that I knew had carried out collaborative research projects that included both university as well as non university-based researchers. Through several contacts I found the names of the people who were in charge of doing research for those institutions, if any. By December 1998 I started contacting these researchers and asking for referrals from people in key positions within those institutions (see Initial contact letter in Appendix A). With this information, I produced a list of interviewees.

Once I had collected the data from the interviews, I also gathered information about each of the organizations the interviewees work in. The interviews became the main source of data with the institutional information serving as background for some analyses. I describe the interviews in detail in the next section.

## **Conducting the interviews**

All twelve interviews were held in participants' workplaces. In most cases the conversations were held in their offices. Interviews lasted between ninety

minutes to two hours. I taped the conversations and hired a professional transcriber to do a verbatim transcription of the tapes. I conducted interviews from December 1998 to February 1999.

All interviewees seemed very hospitable and happy to answer my questions. Some became uncomfortable as I asked some questions that pointed at aspects of collaboration that are not specifically emphasized in the work they do. Still, they tried to answer my questions. Interviewees also asked questions, especially regarding my Argentinean experiences and the motivation to pursue this topic for my doctoral research. A couple of them also asked questions regarding the project and timelines.

The interview protocol consisted of a series of ten questions that guided the conversation with participants. Mostly, these were guiding themes or lines of questioning that I used for each interview. (See Appendix C for a sample protocol). Each interview would start with a brief description of the research topic and the reasons why I decided to focus on it. This introduction served several purposes. First it allowed for a “warm up” period where I tried to build rapport with the interviewee. This connection was essential if I was to gather the participant’s thoughts and understandings (Fontana and Frey, 2000). Also, they had a chance, by listening to my description, to better understand what the project was about, its focus and its language. According to Fontana and Frey, “the use of language, particularly the use of specific terms, is important in the

creation of 'shared meanings' in which both interviewer and respondent understand the contextual nature of specific referents" (2000, p. 660). Finally, this was an opportunity to present myself as a student, an immigrant, and a mother<sup>7</sup>. In other words, as I introduced the research I also introduced myself.

Different authors have emphasized the importance of authenticity when doing interviews. Interestingly, the literature typically assumes that the researcher has a higher status and concomitantly exercises more power than interviewees (Reinharz, 1992). This was not the case for me. By introducing myself as a doctoral student while interviewing university professors and researchers working in different locations I was actually presenting myself as a subordinate, especially in the case of the university researchers. Indeed, in one case the interviewee interrogated me about my research design and offered advice about how to proceed with my research. As the interviewer and the researcher, however, I exercised power in other ways. I was the one asking the questions, I analysed the data and finally I am the one writing the results and representing the interviewees' words.

### Participants

Twelve researchers participated in this study. Defining the criteria to select interviewees proved to be just the first in a series of challenges I faced as I tried to make research design decisions. The distinction of which researchers

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<sup>7</sup> I was visibly pregnant at the time I conducted the interviews so the topic of motherhood came up quite easily.

belonged to this list was not clear-cut. For example, most researchers had gone through graduate school, some taught at universities, others were currently finishing a degree. In the end, the criteria used was that interviewees had to define themselves as researchers and that they were at the time or they had previously been involved in collaborative research in the social sciences involving university-based and non university-based researchers. Based on my experiences in Argentina, I anticipated finding researchers working simultaneously in universities and in community organizations. Instead, I found researchers who worked full-time for one organization. The institutions within which the interviewees worked included unions, grass roots organizations, funding agencies, research agencies, universities and advocacy organizations.

Anticipating that university training might have an influence on how interviewees thought of collaborative research, I attempted to reach interviewees who had not been formally trained by universities to do research. Two researchers were suggested but they were too busy and declined the invitation to be interviewed. The one researcher with no university research training I was able to interview was also very busy but, as is often the case, agreed to be interviewed as a favour to my supervisor. These details may be pointing at a limitation of the data in the sense that I may have reached only certain participants. My academic location as a doctoral student and specific work in community may have created barriers to accessing many community-based researchers. How much of a limitation this is is hard to assess because I could not find any reliable source of

information that would detail how many researchers with no academic training are working in the community.

### Description of participants

Rich descriptions of individual participants serve at least three goals. First, they contextualize the data, defining for the audience as well as for the researcher who provided the data the results are based on. In this sense, the descriptions need to include more than demographic information to fully frame the data. Second, a rich description of participants points at an acknowledgment of the complexities of human experiences and understandings. A few characteristics of a person cannot fully depict who the person is and what s/he brings to the research. Third, rich description can offer an opportunity for participants to be recognized for their contributions to the study.

In some projects, rich descriptions can be as detailed as possible without risking giving away the identity of the interviewees. In this project, however, such a detailed description would give away details about participants that may identify them. Limited by these challenges, the following paragraphs present short descriptions of each participant and a brief explanation of the types of research projects they described in their interviews.

Out of the twelve participants, eight were women working in the university, in centres of excellence, in community-based organizations and in unions. All of

the women described themselves as feminist and said that their work was feminist. The four men I interviewed worked in non-university settings. Two of them, although not currently involved in doing research, worked at agencies that in one way or another funded and disseminated research. Out of the twelve participants, ten were Caucasian. The twelve ranged in age between 35 and 55. I have given all interviewees pseudonyms.

**Ben** is the director of a provincial organization that generates analysis and commentary on public policies, especially on issues of social and economic justice. Ben got his Masters degree before becoming involved in the movement to found this organization. Through his job, he is in constant contact with university researchers, community groups and the media.

**Diane** works in a centre of excellence as a research/policy associate manager. At the time of the interview she was working on her dissertation. She considers herself a feminist and brought to the conversation her experiences of working with university and community researchers as a graduate student and as a researcher in the centre.

**Judith** moved to Vancouver to take the job of executive director at a centre of excellence. Through her roles as university professor and researcher, she has been instrumental in the formation of partnerships between university and community researchers as well as directing projects of her own. She has written

extensively, publishing mostly papers in refereed journals and chapters in edited books.

**Julia** is an associate dean of research at a large university. She has been involved in collaborative research with researchers from different disciplines and with government officials. She describes herself as a feminist and has written several books and published extensively in refereed journals. Julia was recommended to me as an interviewee because of her support of junior faculty involved in non-traditional research.

**Lana** works in an independent, community based feminist centre. She has been part of many projects that involved university researchers starting in the 1980's. Lana learned to do research by being involved in projects and reflecting about these experiences. She has written articles, reports and chapters in edited books.

**Martha** is a university professor and chair of a department at a large university. She has authored and edited several books as well as refereed journals. Martha has served on several boards and commissions and through her involvement in several workers' movements has done collaborative research. She frequently participates in debates in the media sharing the results of her research.

**Nora** is one of two researchers in a large union. She obtained her Masters degree and later took all the courses for her doctoral program. She considers

herself a feminist. Most of the work she does at the union is research to access and organize information for bargaining purposes.

**Paul** works as a program manager for a provincial funding agency. This agency mainly funds research projects carried out by academically based researchers but has a stream of funding reserved for community based research, which traditionally attracts collaborative projects. Through this job, Paul is exposed to many projects from several fields and is very familiar with the criteria used by the agency to evaluate research proposals.

**Peter** is a researcher in a large research department of a union. After working in the field, he obtained his Masters degree. Once he joined the union staff, he did research in a wide range of topics facilitating workers' research teams, which include university professors.

**Rena** is the executive coordinator of a centre of excellence. Describing herself as a feminist, her research interests lie in doing research that is useful to those that the research is about. Her role in the centre puts her in a position of facilitating collaborative projects between university researchers and community groups.

**Tamara** is a university professor who has designed several collaborative projects involving practitioners and graduate students as well as other university and community researchers. She has written articles and chapters about the topic.

**Thomas** works in a large union. After working in the field for many years, he went to school and obtained his doctorate. He has taught university classes as a sessional instructor. He works in the professional development division of the union. Through this job, he has been part of research projects involving workers, administrators, government officials and university researchers. His job, as he describes it, is make sure all the parts are present for a successful collaboration to occur. His main interest is to give workers a voice in developing knowledge.

Two participants played more than one role in this research. Jan Barnsley, who I refer to in chapter two as an author, is also one of the interviewees. Hers was the first interview I did for this project and on top of offering profound insights into the understanding of collaboration between university-based and non university-based researchers, she suggested other interviewees and themes to explore. Jan Barnsley has given her consent to be openly acknowledged in this thesis.

As I was preparing the list of interviewees it became clear to me that I needed to interview my supervisor, Allison Tom. Had Allison not been my supervisor, I would have chosen her as an interviewee because she has been involved in two major collaborative research projects and has written about these experiences. Her understandings had greatly influenced the way I think of and work with

collaboration. I decided that her voice should be included as one participant in the project. I have given Jan Barnsley and Allison Tom pseudonyms and they both have agreed to being identified in this way.

Elusive classification

Categorizing the interviewed researchers is as elusive as was the task of selecting them. Interviewees are typically described based on their age, gender, ethnicity, social class, education, etc. Although I did not expect all of these characteristics to be linked to different perspectives on collaborative research, I did expect that one of them, work location, would explain some of the differences in understandings. Table 1 shows the distribution of interviewees according to their place of work.

**Table 1 – Interviewees according to location**

<b>Funding agencies</b>	<b>Grass roots and Advocacy organizations</b>	<b>Unions</b>	<b>Centres of Excellence</b>	<b>Universities</b>
Paul	Lana	Thomas	Judith	Tamara
	Ben	Peter	Rena	Martha
		Nora	Diane	Julia

University training proved to be an aspect of participants’ experiences that I kept coming back to in the analysis. University training, at a graduate level in particular, is relevant to the analysis I present in the following chapters because it is through this training that researchers form their understandings of research. In

other words, the way interviewees understood research was substantively framed by their research training.

Only two participants did not have a graduate degree. Looked at through this lens, 10 out of the 12 interviewees had university graduate training or were working on it. In table 2, the ABD column refers to those participants who are working on their doctoral degrees.

**Table 2 – Interviewees according to research training**

<b>University Graduate Training</b>			
<b>Doctoral Degree</b>	<b>Masters Degree</b>	<b>ABD</b>	<b>No Graduate Degree</b>
Thomas	Ben	Nora	Lana
Tamara	Peter	Diane	Paul
Martha			
Julia			
Rena			
Judith			

What is clear to me now is that the interviewees cannot be categorized in two - or any other number for that matter - different equal groups for any type of comparison regarding the arguments I make in the following chapters. As with most qualitative research, participants do not fall into single categories. On the contrary, they cross many borders, which makes the task of analysing qualitative research even more messy, but also more interesting. If I had wanted to select interviewees screening for a particular characteristic, it would be university training and research interest. But I only realized this as a result of the analysis of

the interviews I have already done. I could not have known this at the beginning of the project when decisions about participants were being made.

## **Data analysis**

Once the transcriptions were checked for accuracy, the data analysis focused on the transcribed words, the written text.

Jenny Horseman and Mary Hamilton (2003, personal conversations) have commented on the difficulty of describing the data analysis process especially when teaching how to do it. One could describe the process of coding, and finding themes, but in reality, they argued, there is a point where the process is like a “black hole.” One has to go through it to understand what it is that needs to happen, and the more times one does it, the better one gets at doing it even if not at describing it. Perhaps this is why some authors complain about researchers not reflecting enough on the interpreting process and its difficulties, pretending that the process is smooth and without contradictions (Fontana and Frey, 2000).

As I finished each interview, I reviewed the tapes and took notes about particular comments that seemed to be important. I would then incorporate questions or probing comments about these concepts into the interview protocol. In this way, I made sure I collected data about the topics that were emerging as relevant from the participants' viewpoints. This was the beginning of the coding process. For

example, one interviewee articulated the notion that many community-based researchers do the same research they would do if they were based in the university. I was intrigued by this notion because it shifted the emphasis from the organizational location of the interviewee to their understanding of research. In subsequent interviews I mentioned this understanding to interviewees and gathered their thoughts about it. Later on, this became an important theme in my writing.

Once I had all the transcripts I read and re-read the interviews, coding participants' words line-by-line (Charmaz, 2000; Ryan and Bernard, 2000). This process allowed me to stay attuned to participants' ideas and expressions (Charmaz, 2000) while starting to interpret their words.

The initial codes allowed me to engage in a rigorous process using the constant comparative method, which, following Charmaz (2000), includes five aspects. I compared each code as it appeared in each interview, looking for similarities and differences and trying to make sense of what these meant. I also compared ideas from the same individual to look for inconsistencies. I made sure that I balanced the words of each interviewee when using parts of the text to represent her or his ideas<sup>8</sup>. As some themes and categories started to emerge I compared each code to the categories and compared the categories with each other.

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<sup>8</sup> For example, one interviewee referred to the "world of academia" and the "world of teachers" in dichotomous terms, emphasizing that one is for thinkers; the other one for doers. Although he dedicated quite a lot of time to describing these opposed worlds, he also argued that this was an artificial construct. Had I not taken into account his ideas as a whole and used only the coded segments, I could have argued that he had a dichotomous analysis of the relationships between academia and society.

As I understood that coding was forcing me to make judgments about the meanings of texts, I probed my interpretations by intensely looking for negative cases (Charmaz, 2000; Ryan and Bernard, 2000) that would challenge the categories I was generating. In most cases, considering the negative cases forced me to re-organize the categories and the themes to generate more complex and interesting arguments. For example, participants emphasized that they established collaborative relationships with individuals and not with institutions. One participant also said that those individual relationships took place within particular institutions. This one mention forced me to look more intently in the other interviews to see how the other participants referred to the role of the institutions in their personal relationships. This process allowed me to understand that researchers were saying that they look to collaborate with individuals but they were also choosing those individuals in terms of their organizations.

I worked with the codes, frequently revisiting the data to make sure I was being true to the participants' ideas, to make connections between a category and subcategories, building conceptual trees that organized my initial arguments.

Throughout this process I intentionally did not consult the literature to find themes or build my arguments. The goal of the study was to understand how those involved made sense of their participation in collaborative research projects. I was determined to allow those voices to dictate the topics I was going to

articulate in this dissertation. Once the main arguments were articulated, I looked to see how participants' ideas could be connected to discussions in the literature.

In the process of interpreting the data, as much as I wanted to be guided by participants' suggested themes, I also knew that I had asked specific questions that were important to me in terms of how I understand collaborative research. For example, establishing and nurturing relationships, I believe, is at the core of collaboration and I asked participants about their views on that. Only two of the twelve participants already shared that particular perspective; the others struggled to understand my questions and answer them coherently during the interview. As I analysed the data I considered this, understanding that both what respondents answered and what they did not was important.

### Voice

Researchers make decisions about what codes to settle on and the connections between categories. Researchers also make decisions regarding "which data we include and which we exclude, whose voices we choose to represent and which we do not" (Fontana and Frey, 2000, p.659). In the case of this study, I am aware that I gave the words of one interviewee, Lana, more weight than the words of other participants. There were reasons for this decision. First, Lana was one of the two participants with no academic training and she was clearly presenting a different perspective. I needed to make sure her perspective was

represented. Second, I understood her perspective was coming from a place of “less power” in research. She works in a small grassroots organization which does not have core funding, much less ready access to research funds. Indeed, the financial situation of the organization was very precarious during the time of the interview, so much so that her organization closed down a few years later. Furthermore, the mandate of their organization was to work with and for marginalized women. I agreed with Alison Jaggar (1989) in seeing the epistemic privilege of the less powerful and with Sandra Harding (1991) in that the perspective from the less powerful can provide a more critical insight into the status quo than that from the “more powerful”. Lana brought to this study the view from the less privileged in research and representing this view required that I allow her more “space” than the other voices were allowed.

## **Methodological issues**

In this section I describe some of the issues that I dealt with in carrying out this project.

### Ethical considerations:

Traditionally, discussions about ethical considerations have included three aspects. *Informed consent* refers to the need to make sure the research participant understands what the project is about and what her role is within that project. *Right to privacy* refers to the protection of the participant’s identity.

*Protection from harm* alludes to the physical and emotional safety of the participant (Fontana and Frey, 2000).

#### *Informed consent*

In a qualitative interview it is hard to know in advance what the discussion will involve so the notion of being informed is limited. With this limitation in mind and to comply with the ethical requirements of the university, I explained the project to participants and asked them to sign a consent form. All participants were familiar with ethics procedures at the university. They all signed and kindly accepted their copy of the consent form with a smile; as if they were taking it to follow the rules they so well knew. I have no doubt that they understood what their rights were regarding the project and what my role as a researcher was.

#### *Right to privacy*

The right to privacy has traditionally meant that researchers conceal the identity of the interviewees. Researchers assign pseudonyms or sometimes ask participants to choose one for themselves. In the last few years, researchers have revisited these notions and some offer participants the choice to remain anonymous or have their words linked to their name. Usually, in these cases, participants have the opportunity to read a draft of the study and see how they have been represented.

Right from the start, I knew confidentiality would be a challenge in this project. I have interviewed people who are the sole researcher in a particular institution, sometimes the interviewee was the Executive Director of an organization, which would be very difficult to disguise. Furthermore, because I was looking at collaborative relationships, I knew many of the interviewees either knew of each other or had worked together. Some of the interviewees had even worked with the professors on my doctoral committee. If I had offered absolute confidentiality to the research participants, I would have been promising something I could not deliver. Sandra Acker and Carmen Armenti (2004) report facing the same challenge. In their study of women in the academy their participants could be identified because of the small size of the Canadian academic community where women are the minority. “Too much detail could compromise anonymity” (p.8). They therefore decided to aim “to report information relevant to their arguments while protecting the participants” (p.8).

In all my interviews, I acknowledged this challenge with participants and discussed this issue with them. I explained who was on my committee and how their past experiences or organizations could be “uncovered.” I offered every interviewee a chance to look at the parts of a draft of this dissertation where they have been quoted or referred to so that they could decide if they wanted to be named or if they decided they want to have their words withdrawn from the project’s data. Most participants were not interested in seeing a draft of the dissertation and agreed for their words to be used. One, however, would not

agree to have her name attached to her words unless she could see how they are represented in this work.

As I came close to finishing writing the dissertation I decided I would give all the interviewees pseudonyms. Although most of them had decided they did not need or want to see how they were represented, I felt the safest approach was to disguise their identities. Nevertheless, I have sent those participants who were interested a copy of the final draft of the study.

#### *Protection from harm*

Although only one interviewee was clearly interested in checking how she was represented, I was very aware that some of the comments might be more harmful to some of the participants than to others. A full professor may not see any danger in the comments a graduate student makes in her dissertation. A non university-based researcher may suffer consequences if her comments are viewed as too critical of an institution that funds her work or of a person she is collaborating with.

Based on the concerns outlined above, I have done my best to conceal the identities of all interviewees, concentrating my efforts in protecting those participants who could be more readily recognizable and threatened by the information I present. In the next chapters, participants' words are represented in quotations followed by the pseudonyms and the page number of the interview

transcripts. I have included many and long quotes in order to give the "nuances" of the participants' understandings.

#### How my literacy work influenced my thinking

As described above, I used grounded theory to collect and analyse the data. I described the challenges of balancing participants' words with my own ideas. As much as I understood this challenge, I was aware that there were other ideas influencing my analysis as well. My work as a research friend with literacy and adult basic education practitioners has especially allowed me to reflect on research from a different perspective. When I am part of a research team with practitioners they look to me for guidance about research methods. They also question my suggestions when they do not seem to fit their way of thinking about their practice. These questions and sometimes resistance to my ideas about how to do research have helped me see and articulate underlying assumptions. Most of the ideas presented in the last chapter of this dissertation stem from the work I have been doing with practitioner-researchers.

#### Reciprocity

According to Diane Wolf, reciprocity refers to the notion that "someone other than the researcher has to benefit" from the research (Wolf 1996, p. 24). Typically interviewing is not considered in itself to carry opportunities for reciprocity. I found, however, that participants enjoyed the conversation and that some of the questions I asked encouraged them to reflect in ways they had not done before. For example, Tamara said:

I feel like, what's happened in this hour and a half is that you've really pushed me to uncover some of my assumptions about collaboration and some of my habits of disparaging the parts that go well in my research relationships and devaluing those parts and only looking at the other ones. But it deepens my reflection on when I go into another collaboration.  
(p. 44)

I have to admit, though, that a few years after having done the interview I found myself face to face with one participant. I made a comment about having seen her the last time during the interview. "What interview?" she asked. Clearly, each interviewee took different things from the experience.

Another, though not completely different, aspect of reciprocity is considering the community/ies who can benefit from the research. Daphne Patai (1991) calls for researchers to explore ways in which the research is returned to the community. In the case of this project, the community is the academic and other research communities. They all have access to dissertations, articles and conference papers. I certainly hope researchers who are interested in collaborative research use this dissertation. There are other ways in which this research has engaged communities in a conversation about collaboration. Within the academy, I have made several presentations discussing specific aspects of the findings. Mainly, however, I think that my research has been influential in my work as a research friend. As much as practitioners have influenced my thinking and the analysis of the data I collected, this research has influenced their work as well. I shared with

them ideas I was developing and we established an ongoing conversation about those ideas. The insights I was gaining from the analysis of the data and the readings also influenced how I approached the work with the practitioners.

### Validity

Ascertaining the validity of a study becomes a challenging task when the field is questioning the concept of validity itself. Denzin and Lincoln have described what they call the “crisis of validity,” (1994) questioning “the pursuits of universal or general laws, the capacity of science to produce accurate portrayals of its subject matter, the possibility of scientific progression toward objective truth, and the right to claim scientific expertise” (p. 1026).

Valerie Janesick (2000) rejects the “trinity,” validity, generalizability and reliability, and instead proposes that “validity in qualitative research has to do with description and explanation and whether or not the explanation fits the description” (2000, p 393). In other words, is the explanation credible?

For Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba (2000) the central question of validity is: “How do we know when we have specific social inquiries that are faithful enough to some human construction that we may feel safe in acting on them, or more important, that members of the community in which the research is conducted may act on them? To that question there is no final answer” (p. 180). They

argue that the criteria for judging validity should be focused on the process and outcomes rather than the ways methods were applied.

What most authors seem to agree upon is that to make any claim of validity, researchers need to situate themselves and their interests, biases and influences. They also need to describe challenges of the project, “thereby recovering the entire research process for scrutiny in the results of the research” (Harding, 1987, p.9). Mary Gergen and Kenneth Gergen (2000) also call for researchers to remove the single voice of the “omniscience and to relativize it by including multiple voices” (p. 1028).

Ultimately, however, I agree with Hammersley (1990), who proposes that the two key elements of validity are credibility and plausibility. Credibility implies a consideration of “the nature of the phenomena concerned and the circumstances of the research” (p 61). In this chapter I have offered several elements to build this aspect of the validity of the research. I have described in detail how I collected the data. I described the analysis process, acknowledging the places where my work and beliefs influenced my decisions. I explored issues of ethical considerations and of the nature of the topic I decided to study.

Plausibility is “whether we judge it as likely to be true given our existing knowledge” (Hammersley, p. 61). Not pretending to be taken “at face value,” I follow Hammersley’s requirements to present “evidence.” The evidence is offered in the form of verbatim quotations edited only for readability throughout

the data analysis chapters.<sup>9</sup> However, as Valerie Janesick (2000) argues, credibility and plausibility are social judgments and it is up to the researchers and communities who are going to read and hopefully use this research, to speak to its validity.

I started this research believing that true collaboration can only take place when researchers share all decision-making processes. As I finish writing, I realize how much my understandings have changed. Collaboration is a complex concept and a complex practice and it can take different forms according to who is participating, where and for what purpose. Listening to participants talk about their participation and views on collaborative research has opened my mind to the multiple “faces” of collaboration. The next two chapters describe these faces.

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<sup>9</sup> The page number in the interview follows each quotation. Also, in those cases where the preceding paragraph does not include the name of the interviewee, I included it with the page number.

## **CHAPTER 4: Participants' perspectives on doing collaborative research**

As I described in chapter one, one of the contributions of this research is a description and analysis of the collaborative relationships that researchers build. This chapter focuses on interviewees' reflections on their collaborative research experiences. I describe how interviewees engage in collaborative research between university-based and non university-based researchers, how they make decisions about who to collaborate with and how, what kinds of collaborative relationships and structures they establish to work together and what benefits and drawbacks they see in working collaboratively.

I start by exploring what participants describe as a shift in research relationships in the past ten to fifteen years. This shift points at the influence of context on the motivation of researchers to engage in collaborative projects and on the resulting relationships they build. I contend that relationships are at the core of collaborative research. I then describe the collaborative research relationships interviewees are establishing and the aspects of these they value most.

Researchers describe their connection to individuals in relationships based on trust, respect and flexibility. Finally, I explore the advantages and disadvantages of collaborative research as expressed by participants.

## **The shift**

Regardless of their affiliation and their understanding of collaboration, all interviewees acknowledged a shift in the attention towards partnerships from governments, funding agencies and academic institutions. In many cases the references came as descriptions of the difference between how relationships used to be “before” compared to how they are today. It is not clear “before what,” because not all participants gave a specific event or date. Some participants referred to fifteen years ago and others did not give a precise time reference. Interviewees did talk about a time when people worked collaboratively without having as much conflict as they have today. In part, participants reflected that it was simpler because funding was not as much of an issue. Most of the work was volunteer work and those academics who got involved with community groups did so not as part of their academic work, but as part of their volunteer work because they believed in working with community groups. Therefore, even when they had a “day job” as a professor in a university, they worked with community groups in much the same way as any of the other – non university-based - people in the group.

According to participants’ descriptions, universities as well as funding agencies did not value the collaborative work or the research methods used by community groups. The motivation for doing work with community groups did not stem from direct benefits to their academic careers. Most of the time, this work was done on the side.

In the next quotation, Lana, who does research as part of her job in a grassroots organization, describes how a group of women that included women working in universities used to work together. What brought them together was their passion for a topic. The intention behind the work was for women to work together to produce change. Research was a useful tool to achieve their goal, and their work locations were not a source of conflict.

[Collaboration] absolutely did [work]. I think it was because we didn't think about it as a partnership. At that time the two women I worked with who were working in academic settings, both used to say repeatedly they didn't get any points for doing this kind of work. That the kind of methodology that we developed and the way of working was not accepted within academia. So they occasionally could give a talk at a conference, like a career conference or a women's studies conference or do a workshop with other women from the research centre and write up their talk and publish it as a way of publishing something. But aside from that what they did as part of the research centre didn't count within academia and it seemed ridiculous to us outside but it didn't. So it wasn't as though they were tempted to appropriate what we were doing.... They wanted to be part of it and to contribute to its work rather than be a part of it in order to contribute to their work in university, we never had to deal with things like that. What we had in common was this passion about taking informed action. We just saw that this was a tool that could be used and so we were united in figuring out what the tool could be and how best to use it. And so we never ever had a disagreement that had to do with where we worked. (p. 6-7)

Other participants shared similar recollections. Nora also refers to a change although she offers the other side of the story, that from within the university. She remembers her experience as a master's student as frustrating because of the lack of connections between the university and community groups and university professors' lack of understanding of the need to respond to community needs with research. There were no incentives within the university to establish research relationships with community groups.

It was a very disappointing experience because at the time the feminist academics at the university felt that this kind of an enterprise would constrain them in terms of their ability to decide on what areas they should research and that for them the questions that were important weren't necessarily the questions that came from the community but they were questions that came from their own head in terms of the nature of philosophy or what was important. ... There was really very little appreciation of the value and benefit of developing research [ideas] through stronger links with the community. (p. 2)

Thomas, who works in a large union, describes a different perspective, that of a more responsive university where people worked in different places but viewed these different roles as a continuum and not a hierarchy.

Thirteen to fifteen years ago when we started on this journey, the university was much more responsive. [One university] was more an activist place. But time has caught up with them so they're more conservative in some ways than [another university], and [the program] is simply a shell of a program that used to be when people in fact at least

made attempts to work in partnership in [the workplace] with people like us who've been around here for 70 odd years. ... I would say [the university] was somewhat more responsive as opposed to open because they'll claim they're open but being open is not enough. You have to be more responsive. (p. 5)

These descriptions tell of collaborative relationships that were established and developed in a context where collaboration between universities and community groups was not valued or rewarded by academic institutions. The motivation for working together was not to access particular funding programs but to share forces to produce changes in the workplace and in society in general.

Some researchers shared their perspectives on how the contextual changes - funding agencies' calls for more collaboration for example - influenced the motivation of some researchers and consequently the relationships they developed. Interviewees acknowledged that the changes in relationships were part or consequences of a larger movement that called for more partnerships between community groups and universities.

#### The partnership trend

Paul, who works for a provincial funding agency, referred to the shift in terms of larger "business" understandings of the role of communities in research. He explains that funders and academically based researchers want to involve community participants.

(T)here has been a shift in the 90's, it's a part of doing business now that we want to talk to communities first before we start implementing programs. It's basically a trend towards involving community in decision-making. (p. 28)

Rena referred to the shift in terms of a change in research capacity by community people. From her perspective, people demand more explanations on the part of academically located researchers.

There was a time when research was seen as something that was out there and only a researcher did it. Over time, particularly now, we're living in an age with so much information. I think people are becoming more and more sophisticated. They can do research themselves. They can go underneath and find out all kinds of things. So I think that technology has made that distinction or that barrier come down quite a bit. But I also think that what's happening at the same time is that because of that kind of sophistication awareness outside, there is a greater asking of accountability of institutions and universities. It's like "what are you doing?" and "if you're going to do this how come you're not consulting with us?"(p. 37)

Julia, a university-based researcher, pointed out that universities and academic funding agencies are trying to engage university researchers with communities as part of a larger political movement<sup>10</sup>. University researchers compete with community-based researchers and therefore need to become and show that they

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<sup>10</sup> Since I collected the data, the partnership trend has kept its momentum. The Community-University Alliance (CURA) funding program from SSHRC is one example of this trend. This program was started in 1999 and has held three competitions since then. At the same time, the trend of reducing the research funds available to community groups has gotten worse. Scott (2004) reports on the impact of this trend on

are relevant to society<sup>11</sup>.

There's quite a lot of effort being made now to try to get university researchers more engaged outside their own academic work and [the university president's] initiative in the downtown east side is one of those. SSHRC is now bringing in an initiative which is going to allow some of the money to go to partners, not directly to the universities, we're also redeveloping the peer review form at SSHRC so that non academic publications and communications are part of what's on the CV. I think part of it is political, that they understand that universities need to be seen to be valuable in the community and that they need to be seen to be helpful, to be part of a community and to be sharing knowledge with other people rather than simply talking to themselves because I think there are more researchers now outside the universities who are able to carry on and do the research. Universities are in a competitive environment that they weren't in before. And I think that's part of it. That and you know wanting to ensure that universities have a good reputation. I think that people want universities to actually work with communities and to be helpful within their society rather than just elitist sorts of institutions. (p. 23)

There was a general understanding expressed by participants that the partnership trend has had benefits as well as drawbacks. The interviews provide multiple examples of participants focusing on positive aspects as well as negative aspects of this shift.

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community groups, many of which can only access research funds if they collaborate with academic institutions or risk having to close down.

<sup>11</sup> Although several interviewees talked about the need for university-based researchers to be accountable to society, there were less explicit references to the need for accountability for community researchers. Lara for example, referred to constant questioning and including community voices as a "safety valve." For her, the main goal of research is making change and from this it could be implied that community researchers are accountable to the community they work in. Community groups will be judging a piece of work based on the effect of the research, that is if there are changes, and what kinds of changes research produces.

One result of the partnership trend, as described by some interviewees, was the creation of the centres of excellence, which focus exclusively on collaborative research between academically based researchers and community groups. These centres are alternative spaces where community groups and academically located researchers come together and decide what research should be done. Their existence stands, for some, as an alternative approach to research.

The fact is that the university definition of research and how you do it is an ideal. And so that's partly what research centres like this one are providing an alternative for that is very different in itself. It's collaborative. It's, in our case, action research and policy relevant so that implies a different methodology and different purpose. And it also implies a different dissemination plan when you're finished. We don't necessarily think it's the greatest thing to publish in a journal. We don't care if people do. I think that's very nice, but that's not necessarily how we're going to reach the most people that we think should read what we write. (Judith, p. 14)

The idea underlying the creation of the centres is that, first, universities generate knowledge which is not always shared in a significant way with society. Second, community groups have ideas and knowledge that they can contribute to research. In Paul's words,

I think there's so much knowledge and expertise in universities that's being wasted to some degree. There are many opportunities to access the knowledge and the background of researchers that it can really be helpful in helping the community in addressing health issues and vice

versa. The community can really be of use and help researchers in the way they do their work. (p. 28)

Another result of the partnership trend is that universities have started to actively seek partnerships with community groups. Julia argued that universities, specifically professional faculties, should establish relationships with communities to make their work more valuable.

I'm in the professional faculty so I'm interested in how education takes place in the province and I don't think you can have that kind of an impact unless you work with people outside the university. ... But I do think in a professional faculty we have a particular obligation to work with people outside of our offices, work with people in the schools, get to know who they are, get to see what their problems are, and what are the issues out there and work with them to try to come up with some ideas and discussion about professional issues. I think it's more interesting and that's part of why I do it and I think it's valuable. ... In my position here in the faculty I'm very supportive of people working with a variety of different communities. We should do more co-op placements and internship placements. (p. 16)

Tamara, another university researcher, described the interest the university where she works as well as other universities have in establishing relationships with community groups. She explained this interest as part of a larger interest in accessing funding and making the university be a relevant part of society:

(T)he universities in general have become more aware of [the funding emphasis on partnerships with community groups] and they're desperately searching for people who are doing it so that it is more advantageous to one's career because they need us to wave around. [The university president] needs to be able to list us. And there's just so much more talk now than there was eight years ago about that relationship. I mean [the president] talking about establishing an east side campus; all of those kinds of things are newer. So it's "chicer" now than it was a while ago to do collaboration and so I think there's a change there. (p. 36)

Lana, however, said that this interest is for some only a consequence of funding agencies' encouragement of partnerships. While she recognized that some university-based researchers are interested in developing relationships with community-based researchers, others are more interested in the access to funding these partnerships allow. Lana strongly believes that universities do not "really" value partnerships; it is what they need to do to access the funding. To her, the projects funded through partnership grants are not really that different from what they would have been had they not had community partners.

But the vast majority of academics who were forced to partner up because that's the only way to get the money are finding ways to do it in a way that means it's business as usual as opposed to really being challenged by the process. And that's, I think it's because it's pressures that are on them because of where they're working. (p. 21)

Some researchers worried about an overwhelming, unquestioned move towards collaboration and referred to the need to allow different kinds of research to be

pursued. Julia argued that university-based researchers need space to do non-collaborative research as well as collaborative research.

Some people do want to simply write really interesting and provocative academic work, and work at that and I think there's a place for that in the academy so it's not that I think everybody has to do collaborative work at all. ... I think we want to have a space where university researchers can go and do the kind of research that agencies might not like and doing the kind of critical work that's not always going to be collaborative. Take school boards, they're quite protective of what goes on in the school, so I think we want a space for university people to be able to do a critical discussion of what's happening. (p.15-23)

Lana emphatically agreed with this point. She added, however, that community based researchers should *also* have a space to do research that is non-collaborative. Lana described a change in the funding policies, regulations and practices. For Lana, these developments mean that the funds community groups used to have access to have now been directed to collaborative projects that include university-based researchers. The push for collaboration has, in Lana's view, left community organizations more limited in the options for research funding and therefore the kinds of projects and actions they can undertake.

I do believe that while what they're saying that it's a good strategy to have partners because of more credibility, I think at what price is that credibility. The community activism is no longer free to be independent and do its own thing. Now that the requirement increasingly is that for almost anything you want to do at the community level you have [to have a

partnership with] established institutions, be it an academic or government or the corporate sector, wherever, and it's the reins, it's pulling back the activism and the freedom of the community. (p.13)

As researchers point out, whose interests are being served by politics that require partnerships needs to be questioned. Furthermore, research needs to be done from various perspectives:

The more precise you get in terms of framing your research questions, the more your own politics, values and assumptions come into what you're asking. Therefore, it's important to have research done from a number of different viewpoints. It's important to have it done by people in the community who are community teachers, unions and people in the school boards who are concerned about teachers' unions getting too much money or whatever and that by having research that comes from different points of view we get a better debate and a better understanding of the issues. (Interview with Julia, p. 15-16)

If the funding situation has put community organizations in a situation where their research options are limited to doing only collaborative research with university-based researchers, then not having access to funds to do research on their own and being required to always do research with university-trained researchers restricts the non-university perspective in research. This might be a detrimental consequence of collaboration for community groups.

## **How researchers work together**

In the previous section I provided a description of the shift researchers experienced and how they believe it has affected their work. This section describes how researchers establish collaborative relationships within this new context, the kinds of relationships they establish and their understandings of the benefits and drawbacks of collaborative research.

The data I collected is rich in examples of how researchers based in different locations work together. These experiences cannot be organized into separate categories because most of the relationships shift and are idiosyncratic. Researchers engage in research with others, most of the time building the relationships as they go and shaping their relationships to fit a multitude of contextual as well as individual factors.

All qualitative research projects are based on relationships, relationships between the researcher and the subject to be studied, relationships with participants who are contributing their perspectives, as well as institutional relationships. Individual research is characterized by the interaction between the researcher and participants, relationships with the data and relationships with the institutions within which they are located. It is through these deep connections with participants and data that the research process progresses. In collaborative research there is yet one more layer of relationships that is added: relationships among researchers. Acknowledging and exploring this added layer of

relationships is vital because it is this layer that makes collaborative research different from individually initiated research.

### The centrality of relationships

The interview questions I asked participants were based on my understanding of the significance of relationships in collaborative research described above. I found, however, that for many researchers I was interviewing, these questions did not make sense. When I asked questions that focussed on the relationships they built with other researchers I usually got puzzled looks.

Once I overcame the frustration of thinking I had little information about the issues I was interested in pursuing, I realized that the frustration was a finding in itself. First, it was evidence of the disparity between my understanding and the interviewees' understanding of relationships. Second, it was a challenge to the grounded analysis I was engaging in as I was clearly trying to impose a way of understanding relationships in collaborative research as the parameter for their understandings.

I started to understand that the researchers were working within a different understandings of collaboration and that this was in part what I was after, that is, uncovering different understandings of collaborative research. What interviewees were giving me was different ways of understanding relationships and how these relationships built collaborations. For example, Martha, a

university-based researcher, described the relationships she had established with different sectors, which enabled these community groups to request her help in doing research for them, or write articles together. When I asked about her research relationships with non-university researchers, she replied,

I had a very important relationship with a trade unionist. At that time she was with [a large union]. These were very progressive, almost radical kinds of trade unionists. And she was excellent. She'd never even finished high school but she's a wonderful researcher and writer. Almost all the stuff that I did initially around women in the labor force stuff was done in close consultation with her because I learned a lot about things like the experience women had with unemployment insurance through her and through her union. I published quite a bit on that kind of stuff. So I had very good close contacts with trade unions. And then also as a result of it we entered a free trade initiative. So that was very important. Another close contact that was significant was a woman lawyer who was originally a trade union lawyer and she later retrained and became an environmental lawyer. The three of us had a very strong close intellectual support network for each other. In fact we very recently wrote a paper. (p. 10)

A few interviewees referred to relationships as the central aspect of any collaborative project and, even more, of any knowledge generation and social change endeavours. The following quotation also acknowledges that understanding relationships as the core aspect of any collaborative research project is not the mainstream viewpoint, at least in the academy.

When I focus on the relationships, there's an implicit epistemological stance there that social knowledge is located in relationship and that therefore attention to establishing relationship is as much a necessity for quality data as your tape recorder or more. I see the attention to relationship as having a correspondence to what it is I want to know. But also having correspondence to my goal for the research. But what am I producing? I think when we produce research we produce relationships. ... I feel treated as if I'm touchy feely and bizarre to care so much about those relationships. But I think there's something important there, which is about a theory that over the years I've become more aware of. It's about a belief that social change really does come from "the bottom up" and that if I want to see injustice challenged I have to start in the relationships that I have with real people everyday. This is what I'm good at, these micro-level analyses relating to macro level patterns. Looking at very, very tiny patterns of interaction and finding meaning in them. ... I'm very grateful for those people who have made the rules that allow me to translate this little interaction all the way up and to show that it's a breach of the rules. I'm very grateful to people who look at the social picture and who write rules, who do policy, who make those big things that express those things. We really are working on the same enterprise. They can't do what I do and I can't do what they do but that doesn't mean that I wish there were only people like me in the world. (Tamara, p. 8 & 9-10)

### Variety of relationships

Interviewees' references to research relationships show a range of possibilities of how they are structured. Some researchers referred to relationships where there are minimal shared decisions about the research process and where the relationships are mainly established to access funding which requires a partnership between two or more parties. On the other hand, other researchers

described projects where they strive to achieve full involvement of all interested participants in the research process.

*About “paper partnerships”*

“Paper partnerships” typically describe a model where various groups come together and decide that one or more of them will be in charge and will carry out the research. University-trained researchers who are most commonly also located in an academic unit usually take up this role. The benefits are assumed to be shared with the other partners in terms of information gathered or in terms of political gain.

Although the term “paper partnership” is used as an indication of deception in that it does not involve all partners in the research process, some of the interviewees argued that there are different ways of collaborating in research and that a paper partnership is one of them. The understanding of collaboration underlying this type of partnership is that all partners agree on the best way of carrying out a project and are aware of how they benefit from it.

According to Peter, a researcher working in a large union, what defines collaboration is an understanding of a common goal and of mutual benefits:

A collaborative relationship is one that you want to be in and it’s one that’s got an end, which suits the different people who are involved. For me to be in a collaboration I want to see something happening which is of use to

my organization and our members and I also want to be working with people that I think have got something to offer me and our members too. So I think it's of mutual interest. The collaboration works best when everybody gets something out of it. (p. 7)

Several interviewees shared this understanding of collaboration. Ben, a researcher based in a non-governmental organization, described the organization's goal as bridging the gap between the academy and the 'popular sector'. In the following quotation he describes how the research they do contributes to that goal.

One [way of bridging the gap is] by making sure that the research gets into the hands of the popular sector through the opinion pieces that researchers put in the newspapers and also through conferences or public events that we have. So we get around the table the people with an interest in that area, around half of them would be from the universities and half of them would be [from] everywhere else.... The other way [of bridging the gap] is through our board and through community outreach meetings twice a year because there are a lot of community groups out there who don't do research but definitely know what research needs doing.... We have ties with other groups and they come to us either informally or formally with ideas for research that should be done and then we do a call-out to the research associates and say who's already doing this or who can do it. (p. 6)

Martha always does the research for the different groups she works with. In her career she has been contracted by community based organizations and unions as well as governments to write and to do research about several topics. She

considers this collaborative research. Indeed, she was referred to me by a “think-tank” organization as someone who works with community groups. Martha does the research and writes the articles. The groups use the information as well as the articles to communicate with the media. The researcher also uses the data and analysis to write academic articles and books. This arrangement has worked well for her and for the groups she collaborated with.

Paul gave an explanation of why these kinds of partnerships are formed. Community workers are busy making sure their organizations access the funding to keep running and do not have the time to work on research projects. They see the possibility of partnering with a researcher who has the time and ability to do the research as the only way of getting involved in research.

(C)ommunity organizations who are typically partners on these projects don't have the time and resources necessarily to devote to research. [Research] is not something that is on their top-10 list. [It is] something that they have [to do] off the side of their desk and 'well, I'd really like to get to that but I don't really have time in the next six months. I'm more focused on writing a proposal to government or whatever to continue to be funded.' So those are some things that are happening out in the community that are having an impact on why partnerships are formed.  
(p. 9)

On the other hand, Thomas emphasizes the need to include all researchers in decision-making. He does not think “paper partnerships” are “true collaboration”. Although Thomas did not use the term “paper partnership,” he referred to some

partnerships as “business-like” where some do the thinking while others do the work. To him, the model where some of the partners have most of the responsibility for designing and writing up the research leaves the other partners in a role that he calls “second level researchers.”

People do speak about collaborative work. It's collaborative work, while we're still thinkers but we'll go to work with you, you are the worker and we'll think and you will do the work and then we'll come back and think more and write about [it], and we'll give you credit, and that's collaborative work. And we don't mean that. The workers are still second level researchers, they're called researchers. Ultimately the responsibility rests with someone who's from outside and that's how mostly it's done. What we have been encouraging [is to] give voice to the people who are actually doing the work. (p. 27)

Thomas is referring to the analysis and interpretation aspect of research; academically located researchers tend to be responsible and take over this key aspect of knowledge production. Like Thomas, Lana believes that sharing the research process is important, and she expects researchers who work with her to share research responsibilities with her organization. A relationship similar to the ones described by Martha and Paul would not satisfy Lana. In the following quotation she raises a warning about the role of the community partners in paper partnerships.

Collaboration is a word [that] suggests to me [that] I've got something to offer you, you've got something to offer [me], let's put those two things

together. The problem in partnerships, especially when you're funded [with] a requirement that academics have to go out and manufacture a partnership in order to meet whatever criteria, the non-researcher in this doesn't even know until approached that she has something to offer. And it just is bizarre. I mean how can you think that that's going to work. If it were truly collaboration [it would be different]. (p. 30)

### **Different models of collaborative relationships**

While some researchers are used to a particular model that they continue to use every time they work with other researchers, others develop relationships specifically for each research project. One aspect that Rena was adamant about was that she and the organization where she works would not do the research “for” the community group but help them do the research themselves.

This organization started with the mandate to serve the community and to let the research that it did be dictated by community needs. That was a core reason why it was even formed and the idea was that, using a feminist framework, the expertise of the groups out there is equivalent to the expertise that academics have. And so there was this need to be able to make academic research accountable to community groups. And then to use academic expertise and authorities of community needs and transfer the expertise of both across so that the charge that the communities need was that they've appropriated their voice. The academic community facilitates the community to do its own research. (p. 6)

Judith also emphasized that at her centre they do not have a model that they follow; they generate a set of relationships that works for each project they undertake.

I'm not sure that our goal is to lay it on one particular model of doing [collaborative research] because the process is very sensitive to the issue [to be studied]. For [example, the factors to consider in developing a process are] the current events at the time, the funding opportunities that there are, the capacities and interests of the people who come along. Those are just four factors that affect that process off the top of my head.  
(p. 3)

Researchers at a major union also establish various kinds of collaborative relationships, depending on the project they are involved in. The type of collaborative structure that the interviewees felt was the most successful in engaging workers in research was one that engaged workplaces, universities and the union. In one scenario of this type, workplaces participate by arranging for workers to be released from their work, university researchers work with workers and the union provides release money, coordinates the efforts and supports the publication of results. Contributions from each partner are not only valued in terms of resources offered but also in more intangible ways. For example, one interviewee described that the workplace supervisor came to one of the research meetings. Workers felt that this act implied a validation of their work and of their research.

Julia described several projects she was part of that had different agreements about responsibilities among partners. One project, for example, involved Chinese academics, where Julia contributed her knowledge of the literature on feminist methodology, but she didn't get involved in the research in any other way. With other projects, however, she was in charge of doing the research.

#### Relationships between individuals, not institutions

Regardless of the type of relationships they establish and the roles they play in their collaborative projects, most interviewees emphasized that they collaborate with other individuals, not with the institutions where these individuals work. Researchers located outside the university who had had experience doing research with university-based researchers more frequently mentioned this. They establish relationships with individual researchers who also participate in the project as individuals, not as representatives of a particular organization.

Typically, researchers would know people within the university who they could work with, and those were the people they would contact for a new project. If these researchers were not working at the university any more, community researchers would have to start all over again. Two researchers I interviewed who work in unions described strong personal relationships with several researchers at the two major universities in the Lower Mainland. Thomas describes:

I have the contacts if I need some. I would say 'I will talk to someone at [a particular university] to see if we can get this' and it'll be [someone I know]. I'll go to them but I would not go to the field and say, "[the university] will". Now if they were gone, then you start all over again, cause the tradition is not there, it's not something you can expect the university to do. (p. 26)

Interviewees referred to how different it is to work with people who come to the partnership as themselves as opposed to those who come as representatives of an institution. This difference is mostly clear when individuals have to voice the institutions' values and ideas as opposed to their own. Lana referred to this issue by saying that when individuals participate as representatives of an institution they "are being more than themselves" (p. 14).

This stress on the individual, although mostly mentioned by researchers who are not based in the university, is not exclusive to community researchers. Julia, for example, voiced the same feeling: "There would be some people in the community that I would work with, some people I wouldn't" (p. 21).

Peter also mentioned the relevance of the institutional affiliation. After stressing the importance of the individuals he works with, he also referred to the fact that these individuals work at a particular institution. Although it is because of their personalities and ideologies that they are willing to work together, it is also because they are at those specific institutions they are more interesting and viable partners.

The individual is in a university and that's why you are working with them too. And that's why they're working with me because I'm with a fairly big union and if I were out of this union they might not be as interested in the same approach. And again, sometimes if you are looking at joint funding it doesn't hurt to have a university, a union, a school district and a local union; it's a good combination to look for funding support. (p. 21)

Peter's reflections emphasize the notion that while individuals might not represent their institution, their institutional location matters because it has a bearing on what they do and how they perceive themselves and are perceived.

#### Trust and flexibility

Community researchers described that when choosing university-based partners, they look for individuals they can trust and they know can work around the institutional rules. In most cases, researchers have known each other from having been at meetings or conferences together or having worked together before. It is through these shared experiences that they came to know and trust each other.

I think a lot of these kinds of collaborations are with people that you trust. You know them from all the work. I mean [one professor] I knew at [one university] when he was a Ph.D. student and I was a Master's student. [Another professor] I knew when she worked here. So there's this sort of evolution, one is that we know each other in various ways and you would meet because of interests in similar themes and ideas like teacher research. So if there was a seminar or a discussion going on you'd often be at the same discussion. You would talk about those things. Second, I

think in some cases we've actually been working in the same place so we've made connections that way. And third, I think we both know what the work that each other does and we're interested in putting that together at some stage to make that happen. (Peter, p. 3-5)

As I will discuss in the next chapter, regardless of their good intentions, individuals are framed and sometimes even pressured by institutional values and expectations. In this situation flexibility becomes an important asset for a researcher. Researchers value each other's ability and willingness to find ways of working with institutional norms to adjust them to the needs of the project. This is the flexibility collaborating researchers need to make sure the project can proceed.

I have found that what you need to do in an institution is talk to people one at a time and people who are willing at [one university]. Individuals who will break the norm or break the pattern. These people are working out of the tradition of the universities in North America. And the tradition is a separation of the field from universities, that separation of practice from theory, separation from the practitioners and the thinker, the academics, those people. That's the tradition. These are individuals though. It's not the institution. They'll do anything I want them to do cause the trust was between [them] and [me], not the institution. (Thomas, p.18-23)

I think it all depends almost on the nature of the researchers, as an individual really is what it comes down to. And if they are flexible people that are willing to adjust their process then it can work. If you're not, if you don't have that in you then you're not going to be that successful in being

a partner. It's kind of any relationship really but especially for an academic. (Paul, p. 37)

The next section examines collaborative research as a research method. It explores the benefits and drawbacks of collaborative research as interpreted by the interviewees.

### **Zooming in on collaborative research**

In chapter two I argued that collaboration is assumed to be good and that researchers sometimes decide to engage in collaborative research to access specific funding programmes. As described above, some researchers argued that they need to take a collaborative approach because of funding requirements. As much as I understood that funding requirements play a role as a contextual factor when researchers make decisions about their projects, I was also interested in exploring other reasons why researchers decided to engage in collaborative research and what interviewees perceived to be the benefits and drawbacks of collaboration. In this section I present my findings on these issues. When asked about the benefits of collaborative research, participants mentioned three main beneficiaries: university-based researchers, community groups and research itself.

#### Benefits to university-based researchers

Martha described the benefits of collaborative research in terms of her research and teaching skills.

The great advantage [of collaborative research] is that it has been very stimulating for my research and for my teaching. When I am very involved with community groups I know a lot more about my subject matter and I have better examples to show students and I have better contacts for them and I'm much more effective in what I'm teaching and I also have insights and better ideas about what I want to write about because I'm close to the public policy issues.... I never knew more than when I was on the executive [of a national not for profit organization]. I knew everything about everything that was going on and I'm not on the executive anymore and I haven't been since I've been in B.C. so I'm not as in tune, even though I'm very connected and I know lots about public policies but I am not in the know in the same kind of way as when I was going up to Ottawa every other week. So I think it made me a better teacher and a better researcher. (p. 21)

Non university-based researchers want university-based researchers to be relevant to community needs, to be in tune with the needs and interests of society. The previous quotation, although phrased in terms of the personal gains of this professor and her students, can also be understood as her way of knowing and addressing community conditions and expectations.

#### Benefits to community groups

Almost all interviewees referred to how community groups benefit from collaborative research, especially those who engage community groups in the decision-making process. One of the ways interviewees said community groups benefit is by having products such as reports, for example, that they can use

when talking to the media to bring attention to particular problems that affect them.

Researchers also referred to community groups gaining credibility by working with academically trained researchers who have specific research skills as well as recognition from society.

I think the benefit for [community groups] is that they have people who have certain kinds of research skills which can make whatever they're doing have more credibility. I think it gives a lot of credibility. I remember with [a federal not for profit organization] when we would have a lawyer talking about the law and it gave us a lot more credibility. I think in that sense [it is] the same with me, if an economist gave their reports more credibility, or a trade unionist, that was very important too when they talked about the implications for labor, [it] gave a lot of credibility to that organization. So all of us came from diverse backgrounds and I think they all added something in that sense to the research that was being done. It wasn't just people giving their impressions of what the implications are going to be. It was a good combination. (Martha, p. 21-22)

Rena, however, referred to the notion of credibility and emphasized its negative connotations. What community groups know and have known for a long time does not have the same value unless a researcher with academic training validates it.

I know that community groups can say things for 10 years or two decades or three decades and nobody will listen. An academic has to say it once

and with the right media coverage that'll be heard all across the country.  
(p. 27)

Peter pointed out that there are different types of credibility. As much as academically based researchers bring credibility to community group's knowledge, community groups also give a different kind of credibility to academically located researchers' knowledge.

It also works because the [workplace] is more interested in something from a university than it is if it's coming from us. So that for a [workplace], research coming from [the university] has perhaps a higher status than coming from the union. But at the same time if the union is involved they see that as a political [issue] but they also see a balance. They say there is 'the university's [influence], the union's [influence], the management's [influence]', rather than just money to the union. So I think the collaboration is partly the process. It enables something to happen without it being seen just as the union or just as [the university] or just as management. (p. 7)

Rena spoke about the potential collaborative research has for generating changes in communities as opposed to non-collaborative research.

I think [collaboration] can be one of the most empowering ways to do research because it's so real. It's not something that sits on a shelf; you're actually making an impact. One of the reasons why I love this job is because it allows me to do that. And even though it's a job that runs 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, the thing is you are actually making that research accountable, you're making an institution accountable, and

you're doing research that you know directly feeds into people's lives, because the community groups don't stop until [the moment] a report is done. They actually take that report and they go and they meet the minister and say 'here, here's a needs assessment.' And they've actually managed to get things done. We actually managed to change the minds of the most dogged anti research feminists. (p. 27)

### Benefits to research

Most of the interviewed researchers referred to the potential collaborative research has to generate "richer" knowledge because it involves more than one perspective on a situation.

We collaborate because we can do more together than we can do separately. And we can break some of the existing patterns. We can actually have the union and the management and the work place looking at something across a common area coming at it from two sides. ... The benefit is you get a different perspective on research. I mean one of the problems with isolation and research is you don't have the other voice to consider different issues and perspectives. When you do something collaboratively you do. Often they've got a different way of looking at issues and research possibilities. And that's good and it can be interesting to hear the different perspectives. So you've got very different skills, very different approaches. (Peter, p. 29)

### Challenges in collaborative research

Although most researchers referred to the benefits of collaborative research, they also had some comments about the challenges of taking this approach to

research. Time, differing agendas and funding were the most frequently referred to challenges.

### *Time*

The first issue researchers mention when referring to the challenges of collaborative research is time. One way participants referred to the challenge of time was in terms of the many tasks they have and the time available to focus on research. For community researchers, research may not be their priority and therefore they need to dedicate resources to the most urgent needs.

Time. That is the main obstacle. ... The main problem they have is they run out of time. Not many unions have lots of money. I mean you have a few of them who do, like BC Teachers Federation and the Canadian Auto Workers, maybe the steel workers but other than that the unions are on little tiny budgets and basically their major problem is that they're usually doing research for upcoming negotiations for collective agreement. So they don't have lots of time to do the kind of stuff around macro economic issues that they know is having a big effect on their job, their lives, the way the work ends. So they're very, very constrained by time. (Martha, p. 20-24)

Other researchers referred to time as the major challenge in terms of how long it takes to build relationships and negotiate decisions among partners. For those researchers who understand collaboration as shared decision making and relationship building process, time demands are intrinsically related to the

demands of the collaborative roles. Negotiating decisions and meanings can be very time consuming and stressful.

The [collaborative] role is very demanding for people on both sides of the divide; it's an extraordinarily high expectation to have of people, especially those who have anything else going on in their lives. (Tamara, p. 17)

This leads to another aspect of time as a challenge in collaborative research. Several interviewees referred to the difference in time spent in various research activities. There seems to be a stereotype about these differences. According to interviewees, community-based researchers need decisions to be discussed and shared, no matter how long that process takes. University-based researchers, on the other hand, are perceived as moving in a more expedient way.

Paradoxically, Tamara thinks university researchers are seen as 'too slow' in making results available. Regardless of who takes longer for what tasks, what these comments point to is a difference in the emphasis and procedures for different research tasks.

In the interviews, if the researcher considered relationships to be at the heart of collaboration, she would consider and refer to the time needed to make shared decisions. The following quotation is from a community-based researcher who is reflecting on the different experiences she has had working with university-based researchers.

The [academic] systems and institutional practices are aimed at expediency, what's the easiest way to do something and it's really hard to resist. In my experience people like [a university professor] and [a university professor] are those exceptional people who are doing what's right and who are prepared to take the extra time and to do the complicated process instead of the simpler process. But the vast majority of academics who were forced to partner up because that's the only way to get the money, are finding ways to do it in a way that means it's business as usual as opposed to really being challenged by the process. I don't think that that's because they're bad people. I think it's because it's pressures that are on them because of where they're working.  
(Lana, p. 22)

Again, the emphasis is on individual researchers and on the pressures the partnership emphasis in recent funding competitions has imposed on relationships.

### *Differing agendas*

Julia referred to the challenges she confronted when involved in a collaborative project where the various researchers had different agendas, a situation that can surface when more than one researcher is collaborating in doing the research.

In [that] project there was a researcher hired by [the government]. He was interested in trying to make it fit the needs of the federal government which means getting some answers that the minister could put out clearly and looking at particularly economic issues because that's what they were interested in. Whereas we were interested in the meaning of citizenship and social development in schools as much as the economics so there

was a tension between us on both of those kinds of issues. ... We did a report, but there were certainly tensions around that. There was a lot of ongoing discussion as the project went on about the schools and what the meaning of it was. We worked it out because he sat on a research committee and so he was able to make his arguments to the committee and we were able to discuss them as a group and it was one of him against about eight of us which were the university researchers, but he ultimately had a stronger voice than some of the others because he was the representative of the federal government. The minister had a particular agenda that was trying to be served by the research and I didn't care about the ministry's agenda, I cared about interesting educational research. You're in it for different reasons both because of your own career and because of the money and what it means. (p. 10)

Peter, on the other hand, referred to the different perspectives as something he looks forward to discussing in collaborative projects. This can be done in a useful way, he said, if there is a common interest in asking difficult questions and learning from each other.

Sometimes you've got a shared philosophy in one sense, but you've got very different approaches and sometimes that's very useful to have. You're doing [it collaboratively] because you want to explore different ways of doing research and sometimes they've got very different approaches and sometimes we have discussions of those differences [which are] useful. I think that [there needs to be] a common interest in asking difficult questions. ... We're doing it because we think there is a need to do it and we learn from the process each time that we go into it. Bringing in different people to collaboration means that we expand our thinking. If I only ever talked to union people, I have a union mind. If I talk

to people in a university and in the [workplace] and in other places then I have different ways of examining the practices that we do. So I mean I think it's very positive to go outside of your organization and be open to some other challenges and possibilities. (p. 29)

Tamara pointed out that from an epistemological perspective, it is the different perspectives that make collaboration necessary.

I think that if we look at the epistemological issues around what kind of knowledge we're trying to create, what kind of knowledge we're trying to gather, the central task is different kinds of people understanding each other and therefore we have to collaborate. There's a real paradox there because I think that collaboration works best when it's least needed. And it's most needed when it's hardest to create. Those projects where we can both just get in the car, we don't have to examine the car and we go someplace, our projects where we're so similar already that what we're creating is not a sea change in how the world is seen. So if you and I can get in the same car and go some place we haven't changed anything in some sense. It's where I think what works is one thing and what you think works is something else and we get in the car and it splits in half. [Those are the cases where] we most need the collaborative work. (p. 38-39)

Lana specifically referred to the tensions that may arise from different agendas but she offered a way in which, based on conversations and explicitly discussing constraints and requirements, these tensions can be successfully dealt with.

I think that there's all this romance about partnerships and how they can be equal and I think the real struggle is to cut through that kind of romantic

language and to get down to what are we trying to do here. What are the constraints, put them on the table. It's, it's that kind of figuring out of who's going to do what and why that I think can make it possible to really have a good working relationship. And that's what it's about. It's about having a good working relationship. I think that there are likely to be times when the agendas are not going to be complimentary, they're not going to fit. And that's when the tension comes and if it were put on the table, if it were openly discussed, like this is the point where we have to do it this way because of this requirement in the university it might be possible to find a way within that constraint to do it better. (p. 16)

### *Funding*

Funding was described as a challenge in several levels. For example, funding to support collaborative partnerships is typically directed towards universities and not to the community partners.

(W)e couldn't give money to anybody outside the university. So the way we've done it with [the funding agency] knowing is that I've put my name on the project and they get the money. It's incredibly risky because I've got to trust that person to no end. But that's how they've dealt with these partnerships; otherwise what they want is these partners to volunteer to an academic. I mean it's, it's absolutely set up absolutely the wrong way. But they have had no mechanism to give the trade union money for doing this research. So it's been extremely difficult. I'm on one of these networks and we have five major themes and I had the one on equity and employment, and I'm the only academic on that. So anything underneath that I, none of those people can have research money. So that's totally absolutely bizarre, to get anybody to do any research, they have to drop out, be hired as a research assistant. (Martha, p. 28-29)

Control over the funds implies, at least to some extent, control over the project. If one of the partners decides to leave the project, the one with the funding has the responsibility to continue or report to the funding agency. Access to the funds also, and probably most importantly, carries financial benefits for the organization that administers the funds. Interviewees also refer to the imbalanced resources that exist between various collaborating organizations.

Another aspect of the funding that was described as challenging is the lack of adequate funding. A participant who works at a funding agency commented that although there is an expectation that researchers will build partnerships, the percentage of funds allocated to collaborative research is still quite small compared to the funds available for non-collaborative research.

As described above, some participants argued that the funding previously assigned for community groups to do research has been directed to collaborative projects. Lana believes research should have as few limits as possible so that the analysis is not compromised. The following quotation describes her analysis of the implication of the funding requirements.

As long as there's a requirement, as long as the funder is saying 'we're funding not just what you say you want to do, but we're funding how you do it,' then even though the money can go directly to the groups, they're still being forced to deal with the constrictions of partnerships. My concern is that when the participants are constrained by requirements of their

institution and their organization the questioning becomes limited, restricted. You just can't go as far. It may be okay but it's dangerous in some sense. It can limit the questioning and thereby limit the choices. There are all kinds of other things that are problems but to set partnerships as a requirement, is to load the making of change with an additional set of baggage that will at very least slow it down and likely make it impossible to reach the goal of change. (p. 17)

### **To collaborate or not to collaborate**

The interviews contain references to the lack of understanding of what works when and for whom in collaborative research. Tamara described the process of relationships in collaborative research as “unmapped.” She partly explains this as a consequence of the difficulty of “pinning down” what kinds of relationships are needed because what is needed changes at the different stages of the research process and for the different projects as well.

The process of creating these relationships in which we do research together or in which research happens, is so unmapped that we don't actually know what we're doing when we begin them or very rarely do we know what we're doing when we create a team or any kind of a partnership of any sort. And on the one hand the impulse to [create the] relationship is misguided because we can't establish a relationship up front but we have to establish a relationship as it grows. On the other hand 'let's get down to business' is misguided because we have to pay attention to the relationship. So, I think it's like trying to write a plan for any other aspect of qualitative research and I don't know how that's going to go. It's like getting married on your first date. We just don't know. And there's a whole lot of preliminary stuff and the thing is that we don't know

when we're in that relationship, like when we're in the flirting stage if this is the one that's going to go, that's going to last. (p. 8)

Paul also acknowledged the lack of understanding of how collaboration works. He argued that there are no established procedures to evaluate the collaborative aspect. So instead of using set criteria, Paul thinks the evaluation is based on political decisions to fund collaborative projects.

Even as funders we [do very little to] begin to start evaluating whether or not these partnership endeavors have been useful or even worth funding. A lot of it has to do with the politics within the funders themselves in terms of what gets funded, what are the themes for the year, and if the head people in the funding organizations say 'we've got to fund more partnerships.' And how it gets trickled down into the committees, how they interpret what a partnership is, how they're being judged, what criteria is being used to determine what a partnership is. You need clear direction as a committee member to help make a decision because so much money is being spent on partnership projects. And [the collaboration] is not [evaluated]. It should become a requirement from the funders that each group needs to evaluate how their partnership worked. (p. 50-51)

Lana would agree with Paul in describing collaboration as a political choice. She emphasized the need to evaluate collaboration as a methodological decision based on the best approach for a particular project. In the following quotation she describes how collaboration should be evaluated as opposed to how she feels it is currently imposed on community groups.

What we need is to decide that this is the kind of change we want to make and in order to get there we need this kind of help, we need these kinds of resources. We need money and we need people and we need this kind of expertise. When it's done in that way then again the focus is on the change that you're trying to create. But instead of that what people are saying is [that] in order to make change we must have partners. Funders are saying, "in order for us to support you in making change you must have partners." ... As much as I can allow that there're some honorable intentions behind the push for [partnerships], it's also true that it's such a good liberal democratic strategy. (p. 34)

In this chapter I described that there are many reasons why researchers engage in collaborative research between university-based and non university-based researchers. While some researchers are genuinely interested in working with researchers from various institutions, others are drawn to partnerships to access funding, though none of these interviewees said they were interested in collaborative research to access funding. Their reflections revealed an interest in collaborating with other researchers to gain or offer credibility to studies or to include a variety of skills and perspectives in their projects.

Although participants acknowledged challenges such as how much time collaborating requires, tensions arising from differing agendas and funding requirements, they recognized the many benefits. They referred especially to benefits to universities, community groups and to the resulting projects as they yield richer data and analyses by including a variety of perspectives, mostly about the topic being researched.

Researchers would typically engage in collaboration with researchers they know or that they know of. Some had mostly established one type of relationship. A few preferred the model where the university-based researcher does the research for the community group. Others preferred to engage all collaborating partners in all decision-making instances. Yet others would develop different relationships for each particular project and set of partners.

Interviewees pointed out that contextual, institutional and personal stands influence how the research is done and therefore argued that research needs to be carried out from different perspectives. I argue that there needs to be space and resources for academically based researchers to do research they are interested in pursuing, for community-based researchers to do the research they want and need to do and also for both groups to engage in collaborative research.

Collaborative research is, according to some participants, the space where differing perspectives could come together to be discussed and negotiated and where researchers try to find common grounds for their joint work. Due to time and funding constraints, community organizations may find themselves looking for partnerships where the university-based partner takes control of the project. This results in paper partnerships that, although potentially benefiting all involved, do not necessarily represent the community perspective in the

research. This kind of arrangement results in the project being done from the university-based researcher's perspective. Thus these collaborative research projects end up being framed by academic requirements and understandings. This situation is deepened by the institutional structures of universities. I explore how institutional structures influence participants' ability to participate in collaborative projects in chapter five.

## **CHAPTER 5: Collaborative research, academic research?: A detailed explanation**

In chapter four I argued that the trend that calls for increasing collaboration between university and community might have a mixed effect on collaborative research relationships. While some university-based researchers are genuinely interested in establishing relationships with community-based researchers to generate new knowledge, others are drawn to collaborative projects to obtain funding from agencies that now require partnerships with community organizations. In addition, community agencies have seen their funding opportunities restricted and are required to form partnerships to seek funding for their own research projects.

In this chapter I explore how researchers' understandings of research influence the relationships they establish and the research they undertake. I also examine the conditions participants describe as facilitating and/or hindering collaborative research relationships. I argue that, at least in relation to these participants, traditional academic standards and requirements of research have been applied to most research projects regardless of who is involved and where the project is located. Those participants involved, especially if they are located within academic units, need to produce products valued by academic structures. This could be understood as academic ideas underpinning research understandings and tasks. Framing the research projects by traditional academic standards has

a great impact on collaborative research between university-based and non university-based researchers because it assigns different values to the knowledge each partner brings to the relationship.

I start by illustrating how academic understandings underlie research and notions of “good research.” I then look at universities’ demands and rewards and their impact on collaborative research. I end the chapter by exploring the notion of collaboration as a methodological choice.

### **Assumptions about research**

One of the assumptions I naively brought to this research was that by talking to researchers who work in different locations, I would be collecting different understandings of research. I also expected to find how these various perspectives were negotiated in collaborative projects. Although there were some differences in perspectives, I found that the definition of research was rarely problematized.

Interviewees, however, did reveal different understandings of what “good research” is. For some of the researchers working outside the university, good research leads to change; it has to have an effect on the lives of those they are trying to help.

You can’t just have pure knowledge, if that knowledge isn’t going to make a change in the world. I mean it’s fine if you want to sit there and figure

out what the meaning of life is, but you've got to let that translate into something. (Lana, p. 37)

Lana gave a glimpse of what some researchers might use as criteria for evaluating research projects. The following quotation refers to the impact of research. According to her, a project is a "good" research project if it generates change. She described how some of the activists she works with "evaluate" academic research:

(M)ost activists think of research as either something that they have to do cause it's the only way to get credibility with government or whoever they want to influence. But they think that it's academic, it's a waste of time, it's theoretical, what good is it going to really do? It's not going to do anything for that woman who's coming in the door. They can see grudgingly that it's going to maybe make a difference in terms of influencing the police to respond differently to that woman if you can go in with the stories of many women and a lit review that shows that. Yeah, they can see that. (p. 27)

Some participants, including some of those who had argued that research needs to lead to change, however, said that what is important is to produce "good research." When probed about the meaning of "good research," participants referred to research procedures traditionally associated with academically based research. In the following quotation Paul talks about what good research is.

[Community researchers] don't think or feel that it's necessary to get [the project] through a peer review process to validate what they're doing. Whereas a more traditional researcher would feel that it's not really

research unless it's peer reviewed. There's some merit to that argument because people are looking at your work and saying, 'are you up to date on all the literature, are you up to date on all the new techniques and methods?' They're really critiquing your work essentially and I find that's a very useful thing to do. But from the community's perspective and from the non-academic person's perspective, they just want to get on with it and do it and they don't necessarily want someone to be looking down and critiquing it and reviewing it cause it's not a very empowering process. ... I think that's a reason why we don't have more non-academic researchers trying to access our funds because they don't want to necessarily be put under the microscope. They just want to get out and do it. Whereas the whole peer review process is putting you under the gun so to speak. You're being held accountable for how you put things together. And a lot of it is detail. A lot of it is knowledge of the methods, knowledge of the literature. If you're not up-to-date on those things then the committees are pretty brutal. That's the way it goes unfortunately in peer review. I think it's still important to know what the recent studies are on that particular issue, because otherwise, the chances of your knowledge having any kind of long-term impact are diminished and they're probably not transferable to other communities or jurisdictions. I think true research should demonstrate that the outcomes are also going to be relevant to other communities or other jurisdictions. (p. 16-17)

Paul<sup>12</sup> acknowledges the differences in perspectives among researchers. When describing in detail where those differences lie, he uses the peer review process as an example of how this traditional academic tool is perceived by the different researchers. He then quickly starts using peer review to assess the quality of

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<sup>12</sup> Paul spoke at length during his interview of the peer review process, when he brought up the subject as well as when I specifically asked about his understandings and feelings about the peer review. Working in a funding agency, he basically argued, this is the preferred tool to evaluate all projects.

research projects. Now instead of peer review being described as one possible tool to show different perspectives on research, it becomes the tool that provides the information needed to evaluate a project. The assessment tool itself, the peer review process, although acknowledged to be an intimidating practice, is not examined in terms of what it is intended to do and in what context. In other words, a tool that was designed to assess academic research becomes the tool to evaluate all research. In the above quotation, Paul uses some of the criteria typically used in academic review processes, knowledge of the literature and of the methods, to evaluate all research projects.

Most importantly, if peer review is designed so that peers can review their colleagues' projects, why are academics reviewing community researchers' projects? Whose peers are reviewing the projects? Whose criteria are being used to evaluate the projects?

It could be argued that most academically trained researchers have more experience doing research than many community-based researchers. They could therefore have designed an accurate tool to evaluate research. I have argued in the previous chapter that academically based researchers present a particular set of perspectives. If other perspectives are to surface in research, the criteria for assessing these projects have to be consistent with the different ways of knowing.

The use of the peer review process as a tool to assess all research projects is one example of how underlying notions of research that are based on academic understandings and standards are used to evaluate non-academically based research. Researchers are therefore required to write proposals and design projects that will pass these assessments, and as a consequence they follow academic notions of research.

If academic values determine what is considered good research, then research projects require academically trained researchers to write research proposals, do literature reviews, and write research reports, so that the projects get funded.

Rena and Paul describe the need for the academically trained researcher to access funding.

And most of the fundraiser requirements were reports ... and the reports are quite complicated in that they've got all these categories and stuff like that, and who was going to do those reports? (Rena, p. 18)

When you get community involved with peer review you have to have a researcher that can walk them through that process and say 'this is what's going to happen, it could get kind of ugly, some of the feedback we're going to get, is going to be positive, some of it's going to be kind of negative.' And it's almost a nature of the beast, a peer review; it gets more negative than positive. You tend to focus on the negative stuff versus on the positive stuff. So if you've got someone on the team that's familiar with that process and kind of walks the community through it, it

can still be a useful process to go through even though you don't get funded. (Paul, p. 16)

In *Hardwired for hope* (Battell et. al., 2004) a group of literacy practitioners describe how their research proposal was rejected because it lacked “an academic flavour” even though the funders had encouraged the group of practitioners to submit a proposal. It was not until Bonnie Soroke, another graduate student, and I re-wrote the proposal that it got funded. The research design did not change much, but it was presented in a format that resembles academic proposals, including a literature review and a detailed description of methods. The practitioners were very frustrated and interpreted these events as a lack of recognition of their work and perspectives.

### Research training

Although, as described above, funding procedures and expectations usually require the participation of university-trained researchers, all interviewees agreed that university training is not a prerequisite for somebody to be a researcher. Interestingly, some assumed that not having university research training implied not having any research training at all. These interviewees seem to assume that the research training could only be obtained in university.

If you aren't [university –trained], you're going to be an amateur at [research] and it's going to have a different shelf life credibility. But I think groups have to do these kinds of things and they have to write but not all

have the kind of resources to be able to do [research] and that's where help from the universities can be terrific. (Martha, p. 31)

Only three interviewees brought up the possibility of having other research training and further reflected that there are different ways of doing research.

What the women from universities were committed to was that you can do research without having that training. They went into northern communities with working class women who've never been to university who'd never thought about doing research before but wanted to know what was happening. And they made that method accessible and applicable and practical and to the point where women who've never done this before were challenging the academics and not about how the [content] was being analyzed but about what conclusions could be drawn. 'No, you can't say that, that woman did not say that, I interviewed her and she said this.' That kind of authority developed through [the process], I saw it happen over and over again. And it also happened for those of us at the research centre who wanted it not to be the kind of slowing down process that it had been when governments used it saying they have to do research before you can make any change. We learned by doing it and we learned by doing it enough that we even wrote about it. I mean we wrote the books, the non-academic women wrote the books. Those women from universities were extraordinary it seems to me that they were able to let go of it. They really believed in the method at its most elementary level and they communicated it, they encouraged, they supported other women to learn it and they didn't get all uptight. There are a whole bunch of us who just learned by doing it and with guidance and then each one of us kind of guided the next crew who came along and the next project that you worked on. (Lana, p. 27)

Two interviewees, Lana and Tamara, used the terms “untrain” and “detrain” to refer to a process where university-trained researchers would need to unlearn what they had learned during their university training years to be able to learn a new way of doing research. In the next quotation a Tamara reflects on her perceptions of research training.

I would have probably some arrogance about my own methods to unlearn; to be detrained from. And I would also need to engage in holding onto respect for what I do. I think that’s a different thing from other people who haven’t been reflecting on research; I would consider them differently trained researchers. I see [community based partner] as being part of organizations that produce and consume research. Whether she herself does it, I think she makes it happen. I think she understands enough of it that she knows what a research question looks like and knows what a bad one is and all of those things. She’s written books that consolidate and present [knowledge], so I guess I do consider her to be a researcher, very different from me. (p. 5-6)

The following quotation from Tamara reflects her thoughts about the challenges involved in doing research with people who do not have university training and may therefore have a different notion of what research is.

I feel like I’m back at the question that I struggled with when I first started this job, which is, how do I act in relationship to my own skills. I recognized myself as someone who has graduate training in anthropology, who has that level of sophistication in research skills. How do I value my own skill and value the skill that I’m going to teach graduate students who

are working with me without that becoming a power grabbing elitist stance? How do I share my skills without devaluing them? How do I find ways for people who are living in the community who are interested in systematically exploring their lives to quote “become researchers”? Where do I stand in relationship to the years and years and years I spent getting my degree, learning, I really think I’ve learned how to do research. How do I respond when somebody from [the community] calls me and says ‘can you do that in a three-hour workshop?’ What’s a good response? I’m always engaged with the question about how do I take what I know, and how do I share it. They can be taught but I think that they can’t be taught in a three-hour workshop.... And so how do I welcome and join with other people in doing research, what modifications to my understanding of what research is are necessary for me to do research with someone who has a three-hour workshop. I think that my desire to do research with people outside of the university is based on a conviction that there’s something worthwhile for both of us to get out of that experience. I think that my knowledge has improved and I think that there’s a give and take in the relationship and I don’t think it’s one way. I don’t think it’s me giving skills and blessing these poor unfortunates with something I have more of than they do. But I still have to acknowledge that I know how to do research in a particular frame and a particular kind of research and I have to figure out how to share it. (p. 3-4)

Tamara’s reflections are unique in the sense that she went further in her analysis of research than most of the other interviewees. Once she started reflecting on the need for university training to do research, she went on to question different kinds of training, including her own, and to acknowledge different kinds of research.

### Differently valued contributions

Some interviewees commented on the different kinds of knowledge each researcher contributes. They argued that community researchers bring content or topic knowledge because they are the ones who know their situation best. University trained researchers contribute an understanding of the literature and of the methods.

Ideally they would both bring different kinds of knowledge to the same problem so that the person from the community group would bring knowledge of that community group and of the politics and the problem and the people and the way it's organized out there and the university person would bring more knowledge of the literature in the area and probably a broader experience of research. Often [research tasks are] built into your job description at the university [so] that you have time to do research and that's often not true of the community. (Julia, p. 24)

As progressive as this comment sounds, it places the research "know how" and concomitant control of the process on the university trained researchers

What they needed was a method of how to look at something. That's basically what a lot of these groups [are looking for]. And they didn't have the time or the skills to look at something that's five pages long and say 'what is that going to mean for me.' So if you give them a method of what to look for and what particular sections might have an impact on what they were doing, that was very helpful to them. So that's the kind of thing you can do for an organization. ... I think what groups like Legislative Poverty know is that they see poor people all the time so they have the qualitative

information and they know how Joe, who's 18 years old and has been cut off welfare because he can't get a job, is affected. They have all of that kind of information; they have the qualitative information. But what they need to make their arguments credible is some hard-nosed information like 'does the unemployment rate for that group go up when they're taking the jobs of those people?' That's the kind of thing they need to know. And if they can show that through rigorous kind of analysis of statistics that's very useful to them. (Martha, p. 23)

If academically trained researchers are needed to translate or explain processes to funders or other researchers, their academic know-how is understood as being more valued than other ways of knowing. This disparity in the valuing of different ways of knowing can deeply affect any collaborative research relationship. In collaborative research different perspectives have the potential to come together. If one of these perspectives is more valued than the other, the collaboration can be limited. If the academically located researcher's way of writing proposals, defining questions and choosing methods is preferred, other perspectives will be less represented. This situation sets the stage for unequal control of the collaborative project.

The biggest challenge for collaborative research, however, may not be the disparity in valuing different ways of knowing but in the fact that collaborating researchers do not discuss their notions of research. If there are no ongoing conversations about the understandings of research each researcher brings to the project, researchers may operate with their own notion in mind and assume

the others have the same understanding. Since this influence is not acknowledged, it cannot be addressed and examined. The lack of conversation about the different ways of knowing and the values attached to each of them can also lead to something participants referred to as the “mystification” of the role of the researcher.

### Mystifying research

Except for one, all non university-based interviewees have had good experiences with individual university-based researchers. However, at some point in the interview they referred to “academic” or “university” researchers in a more general way. It was clear that they were not referring to the individuals they had collaborated with but to a general description of the academic researcher or the academic culture. They talked about academic researchers’ need to maintain their control over what is researched and how it is researched. To do this, some non university-based researchers argued, the academic researcher needs to create an illusion that only those with specific training can do research. They used the term “mystify” or “mystery” to describe the situation.

If the [workers] were researchers then what would the researchers and the universities be? That is the history so you try to keep a little mystery around it. So long as there’s a mystery then you can preserve that because that’s your livelihood and you are above questions... that is to preserve the mythology of some people. And it is just part of what you do, where you need a particular language so that we don’t understand so they

can charge us higher rates. Like we're the dummies or something like that. (Thomas, p. 16)

The "mystification" of the role of the researcher deepens what this interviewee described as a dichotomy and separation between the thinkers and the doers. Ultimately, according to Rena, this issue is related to the legitimization of knowledge.

The biggest source of the problem is the legitimization of knowledge. The recognition that the experiential expertise that's out there is equal [to], if not worth more than, academic expertise. And I don't think that that divide is one that would disappear. It won't because it's in the university's interest to keep perpetuating that, right. (p. 30)

Judith added that this model is not exclusive to the university professors; other professions have also mystified their occupations.

Doctors have made it their mission in their profession to mystify medicine and medical care which doesn't mean that a lot of other people don't do it and haven't for centuries. And I would say university professors and academics do the same thing. (p. 30)

Interviewees made sure that they also described a different kind of academically based researcher, a researcher who cares about community research and works to allow other voices to emerge in research. These descriptions were based on their experiences with university-based researchers. There was an almost compassionate tone when they described the role of some university-based

researchers. Interviewees said that researchers based in universities are in a difficult position where they are trying to generate change working from an institution that resists it. Some interviewees referred to this as the 'academic's dilemma'.

That's the struggle they have to go through and some people have done that where they say 'in my view what we're trying to do here is not the right thing. Something that has to be different.' I think that's a moral question they have to face. ... And you have to ask those questions. And I think that that's something the university people have to question and work through. (Thomas, p. 21)

In my experience with bureaucrats and funders, when they're working within their institutions to make change, they want to be sure that the work that they fund has a credibility and that they can use [it]. Their intentions will be the most honourable, the difficulty, the real question for me is [can you] do the kind of work that needs to be done to make change [happen] within ideological structures and with methodologies that are status quo? (Lana, p. 15)

While these researchers want to work in a progressive manner and collaborate with those who are being researched, when they engage in such methods they have to face the expectations that university and funding institutions place on them. These requirements were referred to as conflicting with collaborative research approaches.

## **University structures at odds with collaborative research**

In the interviews, participants painted a complex and somewhat contradictory picture of universities pursuing partnerships on the one side and on the other rejecting them by the nature of the academic system of values and rewards. Indeed, all interviewees referred to the institutional barriers university-based researchers have to confront when they are involved in collaborative projects. Martha describes her experience with the university's support of her collaborative work.

I don't think the university does much to help anybody who's doing these kinds of things. By and large they'll tolerate it but it's not basically what they want you to be doing and so it's not given a whole lot of print. Some universities have that established or they recognize that this is part of a very strong service component. No, this [collaborative research] is just all something else and it's considerably less. (p. 16)

Although the academic structures do not for the most part reward collaborative work, participants referred to individual university-based researchers who are willing to take risks and work towards shared research with community groups. However, it was, as described in chapter four, an emphasis on what the individuals do as opposed to what the institutions facilitated or encouraged. This might be one reason why participants emphasized the need to work with individuals rather than with the institution as a whole.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Interviewees acknowledged that universities, however, are very supportive of research partnerships with the for-profit sector. One university professor mentioned that she is encouraged by the university to engage in partnerships with the business sector. "Professors are encouraged to bring in money and to have some close ties with business. The university doesn't mind if you have close ties with community.... By and large the encouragement has been to work with industry." (Martha, p.19)

Certainly the traditional notion of doing academic research doesn't lend itself to the collaborative process. What we find is that the university partners that we have are those who see the value in a collaborative process and therefore want to work that way and are attracted to this place because of that. So there are people who are willing to change their methods sometimes. (Diane, p. 5)

They're not necessarily looking at the amount of volunteer work or the number of partnerships you've established with the community. That's not on their checklist. Maybe it is now. If it is on their checklist it's not as weighted as the other criteria. (Paul, p. 3)

The main challenge interviewees mentioned was the reward system in the academy, specifically the various types of scholarly activity that are considered and assigned value in the tenure process.

### Tenure

Interviewees working within universities as well as those working outside described achieving tenure as a freeing experience. Although the freedom they gain is not total freedom, participants' words reflected almost a sense of liberation. Most participants agreed that once university-based researchers obtain tenure, they achieve some kind of freedom to take risks.

A couple of colleagues said that they felt that as full tenured professors they'd gone through all the promotion hoops and they have very secure

jobs, they are now in a position where they could take different kinds of academic risks because there aren't any left in fact. They have total security and so they said 'we have to give back. We're the ones who can do all that kind of community based or community centred research and take our skills out of the academic centre because we have already met all the criteria and we have that base of power' but I understand that more junior colleagues, because of the pressures to publish, because of the pressures to be single authors and on and on on their work were less flexible, less fluent, or perhaps just personally unprepared to take those political and pragmatic risks if they are seen to be risks . (Diane, p. 6)

Tamara described that engaging in collaborative projects is even valued differently depending on whether the researcher has achieved tenure or not.

It looks different depending on which side of the tenure line you're on. When you're an established and tenured faculty member, doing the community stuff is career enhancing and it is valued, especially in the last [few years], and there's another change, the universities in general have become more aware of that and they're desperately searching for people who are doing it so that it is more advantageous to one's career. I still believe that if I had an untenured colleague come to me and ask me for advice about, how best to build their career and their pre-tenure years, that I would caution them against some of the things I did. Especially the [collaborative] project. I still hear that talk that devalues the pragmatic, that devalues the collaborative and that emphasizes the individualistic achievement model within the university. (p. 35)

Julia acknowledges that some professors may try to apply more traditional academic rewards and values. However, as associate dean, she uses her

university collective agreement for appointment, reappointment and tenure for faculty. According to these criteria, institutional regulations state the need to recognize how different faculties should regard and understand what scholarly activity is. Julia points at the collective agreement to show how universities can accommodate researchers' experiences with collaborative projects.

There may be people who try to argue that [the university does not value collaborative research with community groups] but it's not what the collective agreement says and the notion that quality and impact and importance matters more than counting articles is something that I personally have always been committed to and I think there are other people around here who are and they've certainly gotten cases through promotions committees on that basis. (p. 11)

The previous quotation shows a commitment from Julia to do and support university-based researchers who do collaborative work. It seems, however, that the way the rules are put into practice does not reflect those agreements. The next quotation from Martha also points at the possibilities of doing collaborative work while advancing one's academic career, but she explains that it is hard on the individual because it is added work, not work done instead of the traditional scholarly work.

You don't get anywhere in [the] university if you don't have substantial scholarly writing. That's crucial. But I don't think that political activism and working with community groups hurts anybody's career in a university. I think it helps it. It's just a very hard thing to do. I mean you need an

enormous amount of energy and you need a lot of interest to do it and a lot of help in order to be able to do it. (p. 12-13)

### Publications

According to interviewees, what universities value most is publications.

What counts most is your publishing, that's what the university considers most significant. So if you've done that you get the highest reward. So [the hierarchy in university recognition starts with] a book, refereed academic journals and then, third down the line are edited collections.

The more authors there are of course the least they [are] valued. I mean if it's co-authored it's valuable but not as valuable as if it's single authored. Single author is preferable. So if all of your work is only co-authored you can be sure you will not get tenured. And then, anything else you publish is considered under another category. Basically [it's] nice you've done certain kinds of papers and government reports, even keynote addresses but.... And so now I'm full professor and none of this matters.

(Martha, p. 16)

In collaborative research, some partners expect to participate in the analysis as well as in the writing of reports and articles about the shared project. Academic expectations of single authored publications may become a challenge as university-based researchers can struggle with their need for institutional recognition on the one hand and commitments to their collaborative partners on the other.

The institutional rewards of the academy place university-based researchers in a difficult situation. If they want to establish a collaborative research project that truly opens up the possibility for negotiated methods and inclusion of a variety of ways of knowing, they risk not producing what the university values most. If, like Martha, they decide to engage in collaborative projects and produce academically recognized products, they do so at the expense of their own time and energy. Writing publishable articles and chapters is something that many researchers would do on top of doing the collaborative project, not as part of the project.

### **Collaborative research: A methods related choice**

Collaborative research can be a space where a variety of ways of knowing can come together. For this to take place, all included perspectives need to be allowed to surface. If the institutional as well as individual constraints and strengths are not explicitly acknowledged, discussed and negotiated, researchers miss the opportunity to learn from each other and to find new ways of understanding problems. I argue that this situation may allow one way of knowing to be regarded as *the* way of knowing. If, as I have argued in this chapter, the academic perspectives are the assumed “better” ways of doing research, then research that is potentially collaborative becomes academic research carried out by researchers based in different locations.

Making assumptions explicit and negotiating ways of knowing are not simple tasks. I believe that collaboration is, and should be regarded as, a methodological choice, and as such should be evaluated and discussed the way any other research choice is discussed. Researchers need to spend time and energy evaluating their options. Aspects to consider in this evaluation include budget, time constraints, and expectations of all involved. It is within that context that researchers can make a decision about the best choices for the project in terms of the methods to be used and the relationships to be developed. This assessment should include reflections on the impact of relationships in knowledge generation as well as a discussion of how different individual, professional and institutional pressures could affect the collaboration and the research.

As long as partners evaluate their options for how to set up their collaboration and are as clear as they can be at each stage of the research about their roles and responsibilities, then collaboration has the potential to include different voices. However, for researchers to be able to assess their options and include different voices, there needs to be recognition of the validity of different understandings of research. In the final chapter I propose a strategy for talking about research that could facilitate conversations among researchers about the different notions of research they bring to the research projects.

## **CHAPTER 6: A starting point for a dialogue**

The researchers I interviewed for this study shared with me their experiences with and understandings of collaborative research. Their ideas are the basis for the answers to the three research questions. This chapter starts with a summary of the findings of this study. I then propose a strategy for talking about research that I believe can be useful to those wishing to generate a space for dialogue in their collaborative research projects. The chapter ends with suggestions for further research and final thoughts.

### **What motivates researchers**

The first research question I posed for the study asked: *What motivates researchers to engage in collaborative research between university-based and non university-based researchers?*

Primarily, this study shows that researchers choose to engage in collaborative research because they can see benefits to the community and to the university. Although most interviewed researchers referred to other researchers who enter collaborations to benefit from particular funding programs, participants in this study choose to collaborate with researchers based in a different institution because they think it is a helpful approach for those involved and because of the potential collaboration has for enriching the process and product of research. For some, collaborative research is one way academically based researchers can

help community groups do research. Others emphasized that collaboration brings researchers with different experiences and perspectives to study one problem together. Tamara, for example, argued that collaboration is most needed when there are different perspectives on one issue, because there is a need to capture those differences to gain a more complex understanding of the topic under study.

Researchers mostly choose to work with other individuals they know or know of, people they have met at conferences or through other projects. It is important for researchers to know they can trust their partners and that each is flexible enough to navigate the demands of their organizations. The notion that collaboration is built among individuals and not between institutions is an important one. At the same time, these person-to-person relationships are powerfully shaped by their institutional and organizational locations.

The collaborative structures that researchers build are influenced by the requirements of each project and by the needs and expectations of those involved. Many researchers understood “paper partnerships” as one kind of collaboration. Several participants explained that in some cases that was the arrangement that best suited their needs and those of their institutions. This understanding is consistent with the literature where authors describe a variety of roles university-based researchers can play in collaborative research projects with community groups (Cancian, 1992; Stoecker, 1997). In this study, for

example, Martha described her experience of doing collaborative research as doing and writing the research for the various groups she worked with. She plays what Stoecker (1997) would call a “consultant researcher role”. On the other hand Lana, Rena and Tamara pursue collaborative relationships that see all partners involved in all decisions. For them, a “participant role” where the researcher engages with community groups to do the research may be more appropriate.

### **How researchers’ understandings of research and of collaboration influence relationships**

The second research question I posed asked: *How do researchers’ understandings of research and of collaboration influence the relationships they establish and the research projects they develop?*

One of the findings that I perceive as most significant is that although researchers may be based in different locations, research is still mostly in the hands and under the responsibility of university trained researchers. These researchers bring into the research process their understandings of what research is and how it should be designed, carried out, and disseminated. These understandings are framed by traditional academic conceptions of knowledge and of research. When researchers with different assumptions and skills come together, academic understandings dominate the progress of the project.

I would argue that this overpowering of ideas by academic notions is related to at least two issues: generalized understanding of the role of the academy and practical aspects of research tasks. First, the academy is widely regarded as the social institution that generates and “holds” “true” knowledge (Kuokkanen, forthcoming). With this understanding there is generalized confidence that academically located researchers know “how to do research”.<sup>14</sup> Academic researchers have been trained to do research and know about other researchers’ work. When university trained researchers and community researchers come together, this generalized notion can permeate their relationships and assign the academically located researchers the major responsibilities.

The second way in which academic notions of research overpower collaboration is a more practical one. Researchers working in academic units are supposed to do research as part of their jobs. This is also the case of researchers working in some big unions who have also undergone academic research training. For many researchers working in community organizations, research is just one more of many jobs they need to do and one that they do not necessarily get funded to do. As Paul argued, the need to do research is weighted against keeping the organization running. In these conditions, it is not surprising that academic understandings take a prominent stance.

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<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note that this generalized sense is neither unanimous nor consistent. As much as the “general public” trusts the academy, there is also a notion that academic researchers are disconnected from the real world.

## **What conditions foster and inhibit collaborative research**

The third research question I posed was: *What are the conditions that promote collaborative research as perceived by the participants?*

One of the themes that was analysed in detail by a few interviewees was that of the conditions that influence their ability to design and carry out collaborative research projects with researchers based in different organizations. Two aspects were especially described: funding requirements and academic reward systems.

The literature describes how funding requirements have become an obstacle in collaborative research by having made collaboration a requirement to participate in certain funding programs, especially those that include community researchers (Barnsley, 1995; Strong-Boag, 1994). Some argue that outside forces are driving research agendas through funding criteria and this threatens academic freedom (Porter, 1997). Other authors defend the need for research that does not include community members. They argue that there are topics that academics would want – and should be able - to pursue that others may not be interested in studying with them (Tom and Herbert, 2002). Some participants also contend that academics and community researchers need to have a space where they can design and carry out research projects of their own interests. In the current situation academically based researchers can apply for other sources of funding. Community researchers on the other hand, have seen their options restricted. According to some participants and to Scott (2003), the funds previously reserved for community groups to do research have now been re-directed to fund

collaborative research between community groups and university-based researchers. These conditions, contrary to what had arguably been the original intent of the funding programmes, may be excluding the participation of many community groups in research as they cannot apply for research funds to carry out independent research projects and may have trouble establishing relationships with academically located researchers.

In addition, funding criteria seem to value the participation of those researchers who have had academic training. Not only do research proposals need to be written and articulated in a manner that is consistent with academic practices, but also the participation of university graduates and professors increases the chances of being considered for most grants.

In terms of institutional conditions, both the literature and participants described how academic reward systems do not foster researchers' engagement in collaborative projects. Those researchers who wish to work collaboratively with researchers outside the university have found that the emphasis on publishing and on individual advancement are in conflict with the values of collaborative research. Although Martha and a few authors (Cancian, 1997, Krajewski, 1999) describe how they were able to advance their academic careers while doing research with community groups, most references are to the stress and inhibiting effect academic culture has on collaborative research.

The findings of this study point at conflicting aspects of the practice of collaborative research. While participants want to engage in collaborative research to include different perspectives on the problems to be researched, they find that there are pressures to design and carry out the project following traditional academic understandings which limit the involvement of those who do not have academic training. How can different points of view about a particular problem and about how to generate knowledge be cultivated while at the same time completing a project in time, within budget and producing individually authored publishable articles? In the next section I propose that for different standpoints to be developed and included, researchers need to engage in projects where one of the main tasks is to critically deconstruct the understandings of research they bring to the project.

### **The need for a critical look at the understanding of research**

One of the issues feminist standpoint theorists have pointed out is that the research process is inherently dependent on the researcher's socio-political situation (Harding, 1987; Hartsock, 1998; Jaggar, 1989). Who, how, why and where research happens, feminist authors argue, affects what the knowledge generation process will look like. In the interviews I found that many researchers took for granted the definition of research and when pressed for more clarification resorted to definitions that were embedded in academic practices such as peer and literature reviews.

In my practice as a research friend, I also found that even very critical and progressive practitioners started a project with assumptions about what research is. I understood that one of the first conversations that needed to occur was one where assumptions about knowledge and about research could be critically explored. I understand this to be an ongoing conversation, one where notions and beliefs are gradually discovered, shared and analysed, but also one conversation that needs to be opened up at the beginning of any research relationship.

These discussions would not be possible without an acknowledgement that collaborating researchers bring to the projects and to the relationships valid understandings of knowledge and of how to generate knowledge. It is with that aim in mind that I propose a strategy for talking about research based on a description of the goal and essential components of the process called research.

A conversation about what research is highlights the inherently political nature of the process of knowledge production. Such discussion can encourage reflection about what research is and recognition that no one group has the monopoly on a definition. Discussing the conception of research can prompt conversations about each researcher's location and relative privilege.

I am offering this strategy as a tool, a starting point in the deconstruction of the notions collaborating researchers bring to projects. This is a strategy that I have used in my work as research friend, engaging practitioners in conversations

about what knowledge is, who generates knowledge and how. I have found that by presenting the conception of research as a developing understanding, one which anyone can have a stab at, practitioners have gotten involved in a critical analysis of their understandings of research -- as have I. Many conversations with practitioners and other colleagues have contributed to the strategy I present below.

### A strategy for talking about research

In the interviews, many participants referred to the mystification of the role of “the researcher”. Academically based researchers behave as if they were the only ones who can do research, some participants argued. The strategy I am proposing consists of detaching the concept of research from how it has been traditionally carried out to uncover the essential elements of the process. The intent is to open up a discussion that will explore underlying assumptions and unexamined practices that play a part in how research is carried out and reflected upon. I am aware that the conception I use for these conversations is a product of my experience both in the academy and in community and that it is most probably biased toward a Western understanding of research.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>My intent in describing some of the biases I bring to the conception of research is to acknowledge that it is a product of a particular and developing location. As I engage in conversations about conceptions of research with different practitioners, I become more aware of how my own understandings have been shaped by my upbringing in a white middle class urban environment, my formal education in traditional institutions – from a kindergarten teacher to a graduate student. Challenges to my conceptions came mostly from those who had different career and personal paths. I believe that dialoguing with people with “different ways of knowing” is one way of becoming aware of one’s way of knowing.

***Research is any systematic and rigorous endeavour that has the intent of generating new -or uncovering subjugated-knowledge and is shared.***

The proposed conception names three main requirements that can be considered necessary and sufficient for a process to be referred to as research: the purpose of generating or uncovering knowledge, a systematic process and sharing the knowledge.

*Purpose: Generation of knowledge*

The main goal of research is to develop knowledge; something that was either not known when the process began or that was not recognized as knowledge.<sup>16</sup> This knowledge can be the application of something that had already been described to a new situation, the description of a particular phenomenon that had not been described before, or insights about a research method. Regardless of what it is that the research is trying to find out, research seeks to develop understandings of the world. The new knowledge can be individual knowledge, something the researcher does not know. The knowledge can also be something a group does not know or at least does not know based on a research process. The communities where the research is carried out should regard these understandings as significant and valuable.

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<sup>16</sup> It could be argued that some research approaches have a purpose other than developing new knowledge. Participatory research, for example, has been portrayed as pursuing social change. I would argue that even in such cases, the ultimate goal of social change is achieved through the generation of new knowledge. The argument behind the approach is that while marginalized individuals participate in the process of knowledge development, they are engaged in social change because they are not traditionally active participants in the mainstream process of knowledge creation. It is expected that the development of knowledge will result in actions for social change (Reason, 1994).

Knowledge generated through research substantiates claims that may or may not have been made before. In this sense, research is also a way of confirming or refuting previous knowledge that may or may not have been gained through a research process. Sometimes researchers engage in a project to look for evidence of what a field considers to be an accurate description of reality, for example when teachers engage in research to find evidence to explain and explore something they already know from experience.

Ultimately, research denotes not only a goal - generating knowledge - but also how the knowledge should be developed. In the next section I explore this notion.

*Process: Systematic and rigorous*

New understandings of the world are developed all the time. There are multiple ways of generating knowledge. Intuitions, experiences, and observations are some tools people use every day to better understand the world. What makes any of these part of a research process is the rigour of their development and their systematicity.

Systematicity of research occurs in two ways. First, researchers are meticulous in collecting data, analysing it and organizing it to be shared. In collecting data, thoughtful consideration is given to the role of researchers and participants, to

ethical concerns and to potential risks for those involved. In terms of analysis, attention is paid to details and especially to how interpretations are grounded in “raw” data. Researchers look for confirmation of their initial hunches and interpretations but also for data that refutes emerging analyses. When organizing and presenting research results, researchers are specific about the connections between collected data and interpretations of the information.

The second way in which research is systematic is in the purposefulness and transparency of its process. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) refer to this aspect as intentionality of research. Since rigour is so crucial, researchers keep careful and detailed notes to document how decisions are made and how data is collected, analysed and organized. Reliance is not on one specific method but on the methodical nature of the process. When researchers describe how they obtained and analysed data they are also giving information that can help others understand how interpretations were made and in what contexts they were made. These descriptions allow other researchers to assess the quality of the research.

For example, most teachers do their work reflectively; they examine their practice and act accordingly. That way of working, however, does not necessarily constitute research. Reflective teachers do generate knowledge but unless this is done in a systematic way and it is shared, it cannot be called research. This does not imply that it is not valuable knowledge. It is just not the product of a

research process. It is the product of a different way of producing knowledge, in this case reflecting on one's own experience.

Systematic generation of knowledge cannot be referred to as research unless the results and process are communicated. I describe this characteristic in the next section.

### *Enriching the field: Communication*

There are multiple reasons to generate knowledge through research. In most cases, to achieve these goals, the new understandings have to be communicated and shared.

Communication of results as well as research processes can be achieved through multiple means. Although in academic circles written articles have been the preferred format, the sharing can be done through more innovative forms such as theatre, videos, and conference and other meeting presentations.

I argue that there needs to be a renewed emphasis on this aspect of research. Traditionally, researchers fulfill their commitment to funders by writing reports, articles and chapters about their research projects. However, I suggest that it is not sufficient to write and publish articles because these do not necessarily reach practitioners, policy makers, and the public. Researchers need to assume more responsibility for sharing their understandings with those who can benefit from them (Campbell, 2003). This could mean that researchers should be putting

more effort into communicating with different audiences and producing different products about their research that are appropriate for each of these groups. Only then it could be considered that research has accomplished its requirement to be shared and its goal of generating knowledge for a particular field.

Furthermore, this requirement of research could be part of the whole process, not only the last stage of research. By conceiving of communication as a continuing aspect of research, researchers can facilitate the sharing of results and maximize the potential for their research to have an impact on the field.<sup>17</sup>

In the previous paragraphs I proposed a strategy for talking about research that revolved around opening conversations about what research is based on a description of the three main requirements of a research process. This strategy can reveal assumptions, usually in the form of values attached to particular ways of fulfilling the requirements of research. The university's ways of doing research<sup>18</sup> are some of the many possible ways of doing research, but they do not constitute the only or best ways of doing research. The emphasis of the strategy is on the conversations that discussing a definition of research can trigger about the multiple ways of fulfilling its requirements.

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<sup>17</sup> Carol McWilliam (1996) has described how planning dissemination strategies from the beginning of a project and taking steps to include potential users of research results in the project, facilitated their sense of ownership of research results and process. These participants were interested in having the project have an impact and took steps to make that happen.

<sup>18</sup> In no way do I want to represent the university as having one and only conception of research. Even within one university department one could find ongoing debates about what counts as research.

In the next section I give examples and consider some of the implications of using the proposed conception of research. I specifically explore how research has been associated with the use and value of the written word in research.

### The unquestioned value of the written word

Academic settings such as universities and associated institutions have developed clear ways in which they fulfill the requirements of research. To demonstrate that a piece of research deals with “new” knowledge, researchers are expected to show that other researchers have not studied a particular topic, at least in the same way as that proposed by a new project. The academically accepted procedure to show this is by an examination of the literature. Literature reviews have been used in research projects to show how the new project fits within the field’s knowledge.

Universities have also defined what they consider to be an adequate way of sharing research results. Writing and publishing articles in respected academic journals, and authoring chapters, are established ways of disseminating research results. Certain journals are more prestigious than others but most of these academic publications encourage academic styles of writing.

In other words, academia has heavily relied on the written word to produce and represent current and past knowledge<sup>19</sup>. Not only do researchers write their

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<sup>19</sup> There are innovative approaches that represent research findings through alternative media. Arts based inquiry is definitely gaining momentum in academic circles.

findings, they also look at what other researchers have written to account for “what is known.” Although there has been criticism of the academic language as being full of jargon and presented as obscure texts (Martin, 1996), the generally accepted - mostly unquestioned - idea is that writing, and especially the academic way of writing, is the “appropriate” way of reporting on research.

This emphasis on the written word influences other aspects of research in academic circles. Issues such as ownership and authorship are two examples. In academia, authorship is assigned to the writers of articles, which in turn translates into ownership of ideas and the rights to the article itself.<sup>20</sup> This conceptualization is critical in collaborative research as many times community partners do not have the time or skills to write about the research and therefore the academic partners are the ones authoring articles. Some researchers have demonstrated different understandings of authorship by including interview participants as book authors. In fact, *Literacies*, a new adult literacy journal, is exploring the notion of having writers interview practitioners and together author articles to be published.

The strategy for talking about research that I am proposing focuses on a conception of research that states the requirements of research, not the way they are to be fulfilled. The requirements are to pursue knowledge and to share

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<sup>20</sup> Even as I write this dissertation I am confronted by the academic notion that the ideas presented are “mine.” Although I generated the initial ideas for the conception of research and was responsible for articulating them in writing, Allison Tom, Lyn Harper, Colleen Reid and Anneke Van Enk were of great help in this process. Their participation through questions and suggestions makes them in some way, authors of this conception as well.

findings. It follows that there are many ways of framing a project within the current knowledge of a particular field and reporting on research findings.

Written materials are only one way a field represents and “holds” its knowledge. Other ways knowledge is represented in a field may include presentations at conferences and other forums, theatre plays, and other more innovative forms. Indeed, a review of the literature only represents the knowledge that gets published, which is by no means all the knowledge developed through research. It can therefore be argued that a traditional literature review describes only some of the current knowledge in a particular field. Although literature reviews may be the best way for academically located researchers to survey what other academically located researchers have found in their research, these reviews would not be the only possible way of reviewing the current knowledge of the field.

*Dancing in the dark* (2003) reports on a research project I participated in with a team of adult literacy practitioner-researchers. In a chapter entitled “*The literature review we didn’t do,*” we reflect on the struggles we experienced with the literature review. We describe how the practitioners on the team refused to use their time engaging in a review of the literature, a task they believed was not important to the audience they wanted to reach, other practitioners. We opened up questions about the implications of this decision:

If we understand practitioner knowledge and research approaches as not being solely based on and informing the literature, we are faced with important questions. Who is participating in the conversations that are happening in the literature? Who is not? Are conversations happening elsewhere? How does new knowledge build on previous knowledge if it is not done through the literature? How does new knowledge get incorporated into the field's knowledge if it is not in academic writing?

The practitioners in this project entered a conversation in a field not previously represented in the literature. We are eager to share our findings with our colleagues, something that positioning ourselves in the current literature would not necessarily have done. Perhaps our attempt to use the literature is a reflection of the role that literature plays in practitioner research (p. 10).

Practitioners discovered that their knowledge was not represented in the literature and that the literature was not speaking to and about their work. Therefore, this was not the space where they felt they could contribute their findings and questions. Although they could have still chosen to engage and respond to the literature, they felt their energies were better spent deepening the analysis of the data and working on their writing.

By uncovering these assumptions, the experiences and reflections of the team of researchers in *Dancing in the dark* also encourage readers to imagine different ways of sharing research results. Although academically located researchers have written articles and presented at conferences to share their knowledge with “the field”, practitioners are traditionally used to sharing their knowledge in more personal, informal ways (Alkenbrack, 2004). It can be argued that short-term

impact and small audiences characterize the ways practitioners traditionally have shared their knowledge. Thus, practitioner-researchers need to generate ways in which their research-generated knowledge can be communicated to a wider audience without necessarily falling to traditional academic strategies<sup>21</sup>.

### **Limitations of the study**

Throughout this dissertation, I have pointed out that I made a series of design decisions that had consequences on the kind of data I collected and therefore limited the nature and scope of the arguments I present in this study. I am convinced that there are real virtues to the decisions I made, but I also want to be explicit about the limitations of this study.

There were only twelve participants in the study, and each was a full time employee of an organization. In addition, the participants were all middle to upper middle class adults. All, except one, had graduate university training. In consequence, I did not gather data about the experiences of researchers who work as freelancers and/or professionals, like teachers, who only do research as a small part of their duties. Their understandings of collaborative research and the politics of the processes may be quite different from the ones presented in this dissertation.

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<sup>21</sup> This is clearly a challenge as practitioners are typically present when they share what they know. Written materials have the advantage of passing on knowledge without the writer being necessarily present at the time.

By interviewing individual researchers located in different organizations, I was able to gather information about different research experiences, relationships and projects. This approach allowed me to explore individual researchers' understandings and beliefs around collaborative research. I did not, however, observe the researchers "doing" research. Therefore, the data and the analysis presented here refer to how researchers perceive and make sense of collaborative research processes in retrospect.

Some of these limitations can be seen as fruitful avenues for future research under the same theme.

### **Implications for future research**

In chapter three I described and justified the many decisions I made when designing this study. As described above, by choosing to interview researchers who work in different locations I gained a wider perspective of the variety of understandings around collaborative research. Ethnographic, in depth case studies are another way to study collaborative research. Such studies can offer the opportunity to observe how the ideas researchers shared in the interviews are translated into actual activities and relationships among researchers.

The requirements of the doctoral program shaped this study. As a doctoral student I had to produce evidence of my individual efforts. This is a non-

collaborative project on collaborative research. I was not able to reflect on being part of a collaborative project. Further research may explore what impact and space could be created if doctoral students were given an opportunity to work collaboratively. They could experience collaboration and then take that knowledge into their practice after graduation.

In chapter three I also reflected that it would be interesting to interview more researchers who learned how to do research in ways other than attending graduate school. Future researchers may consider the context of learning about research as one important criterion when selecting interviewees.

In the previous sections I proposed a strategy for talking about research that could bring about conversations about each researcher's location and the various forces that shape the knowledge production process. I have described above how I have used this strategy in engaging adult education practitioners in exposing assumptions about knowledge and about research. Once the practitioners engaged in reflections about the various forces influencing the understandings of research, they started to see themselves as knowledge producers. They were able to critically analyse the traditional ways of doing research and assess how those work for them. Paula Davies, a long time adult literacy educator, summarized it by saying that these conversations allowed her to participate with other practitioners in the development of a research culture in

adult education (personal communication). Future researchers may consider studying how effective the use of this strategy - or of others - is.

Finally, participants described in detail how current conditions do not particularly facilitate their involvement in collaborative projects where researchers located in different sites participate equally in the collaboration. Funding institutions and universities should engage in studies that explore and assess ways in which they can support community-based researchers.

## **Conclusion**

This study explored the motivations and understandings of researchers who engage in collaborative research between university-based and non university-based researchers. The research also analyzed the conditions that foster or inhibit collaboration. Participants described that through collaborative research, they want to make academic knowledge more useful to communities and to include communities' perspectives in their studies. They acknowledge that requirements from funding agencies and academic units challenge these goals. In many situations, traditional academic notions end up permeating many aspects of the research process.

I have found that the proposed strategy for talking about research has been a useful tool for my work with adult basic education instructors. The discussion about what research is and how specific projects are or are not constrained by

external requirements could also have been useful for the researchers I interviewed. Thomas and Rena, for example, specifically complained about academically located researchers undervaluing what community groups could contribute to collaborative projects. A conversation at the beginning of a project about what research is and how this particular project is going to fulfill each of its requirements could have made clear to all involved what each one could contribute. This discussion would have also brought up the limitations and expectations researchers have around the project. Some may need to produce a publishable article; others may need to produce a list of actions to be taken up. As a collaboration, they all need to comply with funding requirements. More than anything, such conversation would have opened up a dialogue about what knowledge is and what role this research will have in allowing different voices, especially those that have not traditionally been part of knowledge production processes, to emerge.

Based on the review of the literature, the analysis of the data, and my experience working with literacy and adult educators, I have come to believe that collaborative research projects work best when they are embedded in long lasting, honest and respectful interpersonal relationships. These create spaces where tensions can be addressed and assumptions deconstructed.

Although it would be ideal to engage in research without the constraints of funding requirements, it would probably not be sustainable. Funding agencies

should focus on better understanding if and how collaboration contributes to the projects they fund and make the necessary changes to their programs. In the meantime, I propose that collaborating researchers address and discuss the constraints that funding agencies impose on their projects and collectively find ways of working with these requirements.

If researchers and the social sciences are to truly benefit from collaboration in research, that is including different voices in the research process, these different voices need to be allowed to emerge and define what knowledge is and what research is. It is only then that all voices will have an opportunity to surface and the field will be enriched by a multitude of perspectives. These proposed changes will need to be gradual in nature. They include conversations within the academy, and within community groups. The transformation requires conversations between academically located researchers and non-academically located researchers, and shared experiences and critical analyses of these experiences. Voices will emerge that challenge hegemonic discourses and practices. I believe the transformation has already started and I trust this study will be considered part of this process.

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## **Appendices**

## **Appendix A: Initial contact letter**

Date

Name of contact person

Organization,

Address

Dear Name:

I am investigating the potential and issues associated with collaborative partnerships in research as well as the differences and similarities between university and non-university based research. The name of this research is “Exploring the Gap: University and Non-University based Research.” This project is part of the requirements for a Doctor in Philosophy degree from the University of British Columbia. Dr. Allison Tom of the Department of Educational Studies is my Research Supervisor.

The purpose of this research is to document the work, struggles, shifts, strategies, failures and successes of partnerships in research between university and non-university based researchers in the social sciences. The research will involve interviewing university and non-university based researchers about their experiences and thoughts on the topic.

Name suggested you as a possible resource person in organization in referring me names of potential individuals within your institution to interview for this research. Specifically, I would like to interview them about their thoughts, research experiences, and their attempts, if any, to work with university and non-university based researchers.

This interview would take approximately 2 (two) hours and could be arranged at any site and time convenient to them.

I would like to use the results of the interviews in a number of ways. The primary purpose of the interviews is to help me identify key themes in the area of collaborative research and write my dissertation. In addition, I might analyze and publish the results in scholarly and/or non-academic publications. In all cases, the identities of all interviewees and the identity of anyone else mentioned during the interviews will be kept confidential, unless the individuals interviewed prefer to have their contribution to the research acknowledged by the use of their name.

Please consider my request for contacts within organization. I believe that this project can contribute to the quality, value, and social benefits of research in Canada. I will be calling you in the coming week (dates) to answer any questions you might have about this research and to see if you can refer me any names of individuals within organization for an interview. If you like, you can contact me at 738-8942, or Dr. Allison Tom may be reached at 822-5361. I look forward to talking to you soon.

Yours truly,

Marina Niks

## Appendix B: Consent letter

Date

Name,  
Organization,  
Address

Dear Name:

I am investigating the potential and issues associated with collaborative partnerships in research as well as the differences and similarities between university and non-university based research, through a research titled “Exploring the Gap: University and Non-University based Research.” This project is part of the requirements for a Doctor in Philosophy degree from the University of British Columbia. Dr. Allison Tom of the Department of Educational Studies is my Research Supervisor.

The purpose of this research is to document the work, struggles, shifts, strategies, failures and successes of partnerships in research between university and non-university based researchers in the social sciences. I would like to interview you about your thoughts, research experiences, and your attempts, if any, to work with university and non-university based researchers. This interview will between 1 (one) and 2 (two) hours and can be arranged at any site convenient to you and at a time convenient to you.

I would like to use the results of the interview in a number of ways. The primary purpose of the interviews is to help me identify key themes in the area of collaborative research and write my dissertation. In addition, I might analyze and publish the results in scholarly and/or non-academic publications.

If you would like this information to be used in a way which does not identify you as its source, I will eliminate or disguise all identifying information (such as personal names, unique experiences, etc.) that I use in publications or conversations about the research. If, on the other hand, you would like to be identified as the source of these insights, I will use your name and acknowledge you as the source of the information whenever I use the information, as long as I can do so without violating the confidentiality of others who do not wish to be identified. I will contact you once I have a complete draft of my dissertation, with a copy of the excerpts of your interview that I will be including in the final version of my writing. At that time you will have another possibility of making a decision about your name being associated with the excerpts of the interview. To assure the confidentiality of all the data, I will keep the data in a locked filing cabinet.

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I would like to make it very clear, that you are under no obligation to participate in this interview or to continue with the interview if you change your mind while I am carrying it out. If at any point (even after I am finished) you decide that you do not want this interview to continue, or you do not want the interview data to be used, please tell me. I will destroy the tape recording and whatever transcripts I have made of the interview at your request.

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to call me at 738-8942. We will be glad to discuss them with you. If you have any concerns about your rights or treatment as a research subject, you can contact Dr. Richard Spratley, Director of the UBC Office of Research Services and Administration, at 822-8598.

If you agree to be interviewed, please sign this letter in the space provided. Thank you.

Marina Niks

I, \_\_\_\_\_, give my permission to Marina Niks to interview me for the research project "Exploring the Gap: University and Non-University based Research," as described above. I have received a copy of both pages of this letter for my own records.

I DO/DO NOT (cross out that which does not apply) want my name to be used in connection with this interview and excerpts from it. I understand that I will be contacted before the final draft of the dissertation is completed to renew my permission, or refuse it, to have my name associated with the information I provide during the interview.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **Appendix C: Interview questions**

1. Have you participated in any collaborative research projects between university and non-university based researchers? Describe it/them for me please.
2. What were your experiences like with this approach to research?
3. Would you get involved in such research approaches again? Why?
4. Do you perceive any differences or similarities between university and non-university based research and researchers? What are they?
5. What would an ideal collaboration between university and non-university based researchers look like?
6. What are the major obstacles to achieve that ideal?
7. What was the reaction from peers/university authorities to your involvement with non-university researchers?
8. Have you written about the process of doing collaborative research? Why/not? Where?
9. What, if any, is the (ideal) role of non university research/ers in society?
10. What, if any, is the (ideal) role of university research/ers in society?