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Capturing Excellence in Applied Settings: A Participant Conceptualizer and Praxis Explicator Role for Community Psychologists[1]

Maurice J. Elias[2]
Rutgers University

Community psychology faces a crisis of personpower similar to that which Albee identified in the clinical field four decades ago. It is clear that there are not, and likely never will be, a sufficient number of community psychologists to be able to provide assessment, consultation, and planned change toward facilitating an inclusive psychological sense of community and sound health and prosocial development in all settings that could benefit from such assistance. To help resolve this crisis, an expanded role for community psychologists is proposed: that of participant conceptualizer and praxis explicator. A participant conceptualizer and praxis explicator has the role not only of working within settings to understand and help conceptualize change processes but also of reflecting on action processes that are a part of the setting, of reflecting on theory, and of generating products that share relevant learnings. How action research serves as the methodology that allows the flow and interplay of theory and action to take place also is discussed. Illustrations are drawn from the work of Leonard Bernstein, Jim Henson and Kermit the Frog, and the author's work in area of school-based social competence promotion.

KEY WORDS: community psychology, participant conceptualizer, practice, praxis, preventive intervention, social change, action research.

[1]This article is based on much further reflection after my Distinguished Contribution to Practice in Community Psychology award address at APA in Toronto, August 1993. The latter was designed as a talk and featured musical excepts from Leonard Bernstein and Kermit the Frog, who also made an appearance at the talk and spoke briefly. A tape of the talk can be obtained from APA, for the curious. I think of my work as a public corporation, shares of which belong to many colleagues, friends, and mentors, far too numerous to mention. I give special thanks to Jim Kelly and Ed Trickett, to Irma Serrano-Garcia and Jim Dalton, to Emory Cowen and Roger Weissberg, to George Spivack and Myrna Shure, to Jack Chinsky and George Allen, to Tom Schuyler and to my parents, to those who generously shared selective truths about me that Jim Kelly compiled into marvelous and deeply appreciated introductory comments, and to my chief shareholders, my family, Ellen, Sara, and Samara, whose daily love, patience, and support I am honored to receive.

[2]All correspondence should be addressed to Maurice J. Elias, Department of Psychology, Rutgers University, Livingston Campus, New Brunswick, New Jersey 08903.

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Community psychology is facing a crisis similar to that which clinical psychology faced nearly four decades ago. At that time, Albee (1959) conducted a classic study that showed the flaws in a mental health model that relied on individual clinical treatment. He showed that it would not be possible to train a sufficient number of clinicians in psychology and related fields to provide services to all those in need. Subsequent studies of the delivery of mental health services found patterns of inequitable service delivery, fewer and/or less adequate services to minorities and the poor, and that such groups as children and the elderly were significantly underserved (Kelly, 1966). This information was used to advocate for greater emphasis on prevention, and helped give impetus to field of community psychology (Albee, 1970; Bennett et al., 1966).

Now, however, community psychology faces its own version of Albee's "personpower" crisis. It is clear that there are not, and likely never will be, a sufficient number of community psychologists to be able to provide assessment, consultation, and planned change toward conditions facilitating an inclusive psychological sense of community and sound health and prosocial development in all settings that could benefit from such assistance. New Jersey, for example, which has nearly 600 school districts, including urban centers in Newark, Trenton, Camden, Jersey City, and Paterson that have many schools, could absorb every member of the Society for Community Research and Action (SCRA) and still not receive adequate coverage of school and community needs. Clearly, our resources do not match our aspirations.

Capturing Excellence in Practice: The Promise and the Limitations

To understand this problem and to find a solution, it is necessary to look carefully at the concept of practice, especially as applied to the area of community psychology. "Practice," by its most general definition, is the action of doing something. Practice can be viewed more specifically as the application of knowledge, concepts, techniques, and skills developed by others for purposes directly or indirectly related to one's own situations.

Is practice done only out in the field, by "practitioners"? No. There is the practice of lab research, of directing a community psychology or clinical-community psychology program, of doing action research in the

schools, of doing qualitative research, of being a journal editor or reviewer, and of doing school and organizational consultation. Practice knowledge and craft is as important in research as in other endeavors; if one is not a practitioner of scientific principles, one is not a scientist. The question is *how well* one is a practitioner of what it is one is doing. The concept of practice is relevant for those who work in all domains, not just for those whose work is clinical, consultative, or advocacy in nature. In a similar way, one can think of the terms, "applied," and "professional" as having application to all community psychologists, in that there is a content or focus to which one's work or practice is applied, and a set of standards for professional-level work that one presumably would be motivated to follow.

Take a moment to think about practitioners you use, go to, or work with, whom you believe are particularly effective. What is it that they do? What accounts for their effectiveness? Think also about practitioners who you have found *not* to be effective; what is it that they do, or do not do? Imagine the advantages in getting the "secrets" of good practice shared around. Almost certainly, this would raise levels of practice, as well as show us where practice is at maximal levels.

As a personal example of the kinds of benefits that can result from capturing excellence, I share the development of the Community Psychology Education Connection column in the *Community Psychologist.* Very soon after graduate school classmate Jim Dalton (at Bloomsburg University, in Pennsylvania) and I became faculty members, we recognized that our responsibilities to teach community psychology to undergraduates were matched by total inexperience with this on our parts. We quickly became aware that other colleagues were in the same situation. Jim and I began a process of communication and resource exchange around issues and methods for teaching undergraduate community psychology, called the "Community Connection." We created an ever-expanding mailing list and fostered communication among "members," not just through us. After a decade, this informal newsletter is institutionalized in the SCRA newsletter, has expanded to include issues in graduate education, and is having a positive impact on the field. To share the "technology" of sound teaching requires more than circulating materials. Ultimately, teaching is "operator dependent" (Rossi, 1978), which means that its success is mediated by human actions and that some level of personal networking creates much better opportunities for success. Beyond that, however, is an additional point: many benefits accrue from capturing excellence, to making good practice less magical, and to reducing the amount of reinvention that must occur.

Indeed, the idea that contributions to practice can be codified as a technology that can be "transferred" from setting to setting has some appeal to community psychologists. However, this analogy can be misleading when taken in a narrow sense. For what actually is being transferred is the principles of adaptation of the practice to the context and to changes in context.

In its most common and surface use, "technology" implies installation and use; once up and running, it should continue because the operations required to continue it are minimal, relatively automated, and relatively simple and easy to learn. Such an analogy underemphasizes the operator-dependent human element of the work of our field (Rossi, 1978). Most preventive and health promotive interventions, and certainly those in the schools, are not strictly "technologies," although I and others in the field have used the term to make what we do seem more approachable and systematic than it might otherwise appear.

A typical example of the deceptive complexity of the technology transfer analogy can be found in the New Jersey codes regarding Family Life Education and AIDS prevention education. The code mandates that each school district have a participatory and ongoing consultative community committee to inform the development of family life and AIDS prevention curricula. But I am aware of few committees that have functioned well for long periods. Attendance on the part of community members varies; staff members involved in program implementation change from year to year. Glidewell (1987) has warned that the meshing — or lack thereof — of various personalities plays a highly significant role in the success or failure of community interventions. But difficulties exist at other levels, as well. There is a lack of structural continuity; even written, formal curricula can only bridge gaps to the extent to which there is continuity in goals and implementation. As Fullan (1993) and others show, the difference between a committee with formal administrative responsibility and a truly participatory committee, working in a collaborative, theoretically connected, heuristic manner to navigate the change process, is vast. The problem of how to create genuine input and productive collaboration plagues numerous similar community mandates, and is given far too little attention.

It is clear that even a dramatic improvement in the comprehensiveness and depth of practice knowledge, while desirable, will not adequately address the personpower concerns raised earlier. Members of the formal field of community psychology, or the Society for Community Research and Action, are small in number, too small to make a difference in the way that we have professed. If, however, we accept the idea that community psychologists are those who work to understand how relationships and communities operate, with goals of furthering normal developmental processes and helping make living environments better, safer, more growth-enhancing places, then we find that many are doing this type of work, or at least facets of it (Brody, 1986).

Ultimately, we need to *harness others' energy, to listen and to capture their work in a spirit of sharing and a commitment to excellence.* A significant part of the challenge facing community psychology is to capture not just the essence of our own or related work but also excellence in settings in which community psychology is or can be applied. What is it that is worthy of trying to capture, share, and celebrate?

- Teachers who are trying to build the character of children, to improve their ability to become good citizens.
- Police officers who work with young urban kids talking about how to resolve conflicts without violence.
- Parents who read stories to their children about the importance of peace in our homes and communities and between nations.
- Employers who have programs to provide incentives for the general health promotion of their employees.

Citizens creating play groups in housing projects for urban youth.

All of these individuals can be thought of as people whose work and concerns are in close alignment with those of community psychology. Indeed, community psychology is all around us; there are legions of individuals learning, applying, and refining their understandings of life, relationships, and competence in the crucible of everyday settings of varying levels of complexity, resources, and health.

Contributions to practice involve making the extraordinary, ordinary; the unique, general; the special, standard; the remarkable, routine. It is having a respect for practice that drives a concern to "give back" to practitioners the "mechanics" and operation of their own best work; this, in turn, facilitates the process of training and supervision and raises the standard of practice, overall. It is a challenge and a perspective that stems from community psychology injunctions to give away the by-line, think not in terms of "subjects" but rather in terms of participants and collaborators, and move toward participant conceptualization (Kelly; 1971; Trickett, 1993). This is critical; it is a matter of merging theory with practice in a way that allows generalizability to be derived from specificity.

Revisiting the Swampscott conference, to see where our ideas began, can be instructive (Bennett et al., 1966):

> The role of the community psychologist may therefore be seen as that of a "participant conceptualizer." As such, he or she is clearly involved in, and may be a mover of, community processes, but he or she is also a professional attempting to conceptualize those processes within the framework of psychological-sociological knowledge. (pp. 7-8)

As community psychologists have taken this inspiring idea from rhetoric to reality, insufficient attention was given to the impact this way of working might have on the development of community psychology as a field

based in a body of knowledge, theories, and procedures for inquiry. Participant conceptualization tends to be focused on the local features of the setting within which one is working.

Community psychologists often find that their work takes them to other fields, such as education, child welfare, human services, human resources development and organizational consultation, justice and corrections, or community mental health or public health. As they enter those fields and apply the principles of community psychology to these areas and the phenomena with which they are concerned, they often find their approaches are successful and well received. Under such circumstances, it is easy to be drawn into those fields, perceiving them to be more relevant and worthy of investment of time than is community psychology. However, these fields do not typically provide forums for the community psychology ideas that underlie the work. Indeed, our successes have come when those who have worked in other fields keep a foot in community psychology and attempt to enrich the conceptual and methodological base of the community psychology field. The advancement of theory in community psychology —which appears to benefit many areas of psychology and human services in the indirect ways described by Snowden (1987) —will itself occur to the extent that community psychologists work as participant conceptualizers, share their work with others, and also provide linkages with the community psychology field.

Creating Connections and Explicating Relationships in Community Psychology: Analogies in Music

By creating connections between fields and with principles of community psychology as a guiding framework, it is possible to shed important light on the details of "good work," thereby making it better appreciated and its features more likely to be adopted into other areas. That we can do this well is one place where I draw inspiration from Leonard Bernstein; his attempt to help children appreciate, understand, and enjoy something as abstract as music provides a useful example.[3]

Particularly while we are listening to music, Bernstein (1992) asks us to reflect on the following: The meaning of music is the way it makes you feel when you hear it. If it tells us something, if it makes us change how we feel inside, we are understanding the music. Stories and pictures that are associated with the music are extra; they may have been part of the composer's inspiration, but they are not attempts to describe the music;

[3]During the award address, I played an excerpt from Leonard Bernstein conducting the New York Philharmonic playing "The Fish," from Saint-Saens's "Carnival of the Animals."

at best, they signal the feeling that the composer would like to capture and invoke. Sometimes we can put names to the feelings, such as joy or love or anger, but other times we cannot; when we can, "music is especially marvelous" (p. 28). He used as an example the William Tell Overture, which many associate with the theme from the "Lone Ranger" television program but actually was written by an Italian composer (Rossini) as an overture to an opera about an arrow-shooting father and his apple-topped son in Switzerland. But, as Bernstein noted, it is not about the father and son in Switzerland, either. This music is about excitement and movement.

Community psychologists' concerns about context actually mirror what is at the essence of music. Music flows in the movement from one note to the next, with the notes being different in sound, and different depending on the instrument and the nature of the sound of the instrument, as well as the combinations, if any, of notes that are played. The meaning — the feelings — of music depend on the context and movement of the notes, the listening environment, and how all this is heard by the listener. This is what we understand as harmonies, rhythms, melodies, and the colors and qualities of the sound.

> "The most wonderful thing of all is that there's no limit to the different kinds of feelings music can make you have. Some of these feelings are so special they can't even be described in words. Sometimes we can name the things we feel, like joy or sadness or love or hate or peacefulness. But there are other feelings so deep and special that we have no words for them, and that's where music is especially marvelous. It names the feelings for us, only in notes instead of words. . . . We must never forget that music is movement, always going somewhere, shifting and changing and flowing from one note to another. That movement can tell us more about the way we feel than a million words can. (Bernstein, 1992, pp. 29-30)

As one looks at the record of his accomplishments, it is clear that Bernstein was a gifted communicator. He used analogies, personal disclosure, and humor; for his Young Children's Concerts, he joined with his audience at times by having children serve as the musicians; he lectured, questioned, informed, and challenged, and showed his respect for his audiences by simultaneously aiming low and high within the group. He focused on key segments but also on the flow; he provided a balance of detail and overall patterns, to allow his listeners to begin to construct wholes out of their own experiences.

Yet, Bernstein had the distinct advantage of attempting to describe a "standing target"; that is, he was able to explain in detail the nature of the music and of the performance in all their complexity, *after* they already were completed. The community psychologist, more often than not, is in the position of trying to understand the work of large improvisational jazz bands, without the benefit of being able to fully record everyone's playing and with

the musicians playing set after set with hardly a stop. At other times, the community psychologist is present during the composing and rehearsal processes, trying to understand the whole from limited glimpses of pieces. Fullan (1993) reminds us that it is the improvisational nature of intervention and change that creates the greatest challenge to the interventionist. Our success in working with such dynamic processes comes in part from understanding prior attempts and improving our skills at ferreting out and elucidating the complex patterns and interrelationships that have been involved. Community psychologists function, in large part, as musical interpreters, allowing work to be appreciated by professional and public audiences in diverse places.

A Revised View of Practice From a Community Psychology Perspective

A community psychology view of practice must reflect the field's focus on strengths and resiliency, on environmental reconnaissance, on processes of social-ecological adaptation, and on organizational-systemic functioning (Tolan, Keys, Chertok, & Jason, 1990; Trickett, 1993; Vincent & Trickett, 1983). Community psychology is concerned with inclusiveness and participation as both values and methods (Kelly, 1990). Further, it is the nature of community psychology to be contextually and culturally sensitive, and to be oriented toward wellness, competence, and prevention rather than remediation (Cowen, 1991; Elias, 1987; Hughes, Seidman, & Williams, 1993; Kelly, 1986). Given these defining characteristics, community psychology's core values have been identified with actualizing our democratic ideals and as the antithesis of oppression (Chavis, 1993; Prilleltensky, 1993). Even while we attempt to incorporate these features in a rigorous, sophisticated, and detailed way in our theories, their utility is presented as a reality in our communities and service organizations (Illinois Prevention Resource Center, 1993).

Indeed, what we are urging in our theories already is happening in many field settings. This requires careful thinking about the relationship of theory and setting-based applications. Yet, it is necessary to go beyond emphasizing the importance of capturing excellence in practice as the logical way to respond to the crisis of personpower. It is proposed that as our field engages in a model of research and action that more closely reflects our guiding principles and theoretical perspectives, we will be more likely to reach our aspirations of being of assistance to many settings. We have to go beyond the participant conceptualizer orientation and move to implementation facilitator, disseminator, sharer. Similarly, we must be willing to move beyond a context-bound emphasis on localities.

The future of community psychology and its ability to carry out research and practice in diverse applied settings requires a new term for "practice" and an expanded view of the role of the community psychologist. Such a role must derive from and be synergistic with key principles of community psychology. We need a role definition that allows community psychologists to move to a leadership role, to a more encompassing role that forces us to refine our theories in ways that are necessary to address changing demographic and social realities, brings us into closer, broader, more enduring relationships with persons working in action settings, and captures the mutuality of theory building and social action. We thus will be better positioned to turn small wins into larger wins (Weick, 1984) and baby-steps into long, confident strides (Cowen, 1977). A term that can allow us to move toward this level is "praxis," and a role that will allow for the pursuit of excellence and expansion of the reach of community psychology is that of a "participant conceptualizer and praxis explicator."

TOWARD A THEORY OF PRAXIS

What is conferred by using yet another new term, "Praxis"? Will our colleagues in the field think we have cast our lot with a new luxury sports car? A new kind of doughy snack? A new computer game? Perhaps a new ethnic cartoon character, a sort of Greek social mechanic? A new design of sneaker? In fact, the term has meaning beyond that of the word "practice" that resonates strongly with the mission of community psychology: Praxis is willed action by which a theory or philosophy becomes social action.

The concept of praxis adds to the ideas of those who view the community psychologist as a reflective and generative practitioner (Dokecki, 1992). Praxis is more than reflective practice, which involves awareness of one's processes, what worked with whom, when, how, and so forth (Newbrough, 1992). Praxis is more than generative practice, which involves "products" that can be examined, shared, and so forth, so that the work of practice and reflections on the processes can be more public, become cross-validated, and build the technical storehouses of those who work in the field. Both reflective and generative practice are part of feedback models that reach beyond the work of the individual. Sharing information about one's practice broadly brings knowledge generation outside of the individual and into the testing ground of social reality (Newbrough, 1992; Price & Cherniss, 1977).

Though both are critical parts of praxis, the latter has an added dimension: forging a continuous link from theory to action, back to theory and action, and especially to a community psychology theory, a theory that is transactional, developmental, and social ecological at its core (Innes, 1981; Jason, 1992; Newbrough, 1992; Tolan et al., 1990; Trickett, 1993). A participant conceptualizer and praxis explicator has the role not only of working within settings to understand and help conceptualize change processes but also of reflecting on action processes that are a part of the setting, of reflecting on theory, and of generating products that share relevant learnings. The praxis explicator in particular works to identify the elusive, dynamic processes of multifaceted, multisystemic interrelationships that are the essence of change (Fullan, 1993; Sarason, 1983). Moreover, through praxis explication, community psychologists can be at the forefront of identifying complex patterns through which change has proceeded in various contexts, and offer guidelines for navigating the avowedly uncertain future course an intervention might take. Although luck plays a role in the natural history of change efforts, participant conceptualizers and praxis explicators can play a significant role in helping to react to unforeseen events in a way that fosters the goals of a change effort.

The reference point is the development of theoretical principles that are derived from extensively capturing excellent, context-sensitive practice and linking it to theory. To the participant conceptualizer and praxis explicator, theory, research, and practice are all merged in particular contexts of inquiry, in the specific phenomena and settings being studied. These facets must be brought forward *together* and shared widely in the field, so that an ecologically sound community psychology can be built. Further, by so doing, participant conceptualizers and praxis explicators make it more likely that others — especially those who are not community psychologists — working in similar settings or on similar problems can derive careful learning from the work being done elsewhere. Participant conceptualizers and praxis explicators increase the ranks of those who are functioning within the field of community research and action, even though they might not have heard formally of the field.

I can offer an example of this from my own work. The problem of concern to me was how to take the excellent work that I was aware of in the area of life skills development, social decision making and problem solving, and social competence promotion at the middle-school level and bring it to wider attention. This age level was being recognized increasingly as a "turning point" for preventive efforts (Task Force on Adolescent Development, 1989), and I was aware of relevant work through direct experience of its operation in the schools and with parents. The challenge, to me, was that others would need access to the work without sharing my

direct experiential base. I have always been impressed with the book written by Muñoz, Snowden, and Kelly (1979), which I read as a graduate student; in it, they had the authors' standard chapters, followed by interviews that attempted to elicit the reality behind the practice, what I always thought of as, "Okay, we read what you wrote. Now tell us what really happened and some of the details of the work." In a similar way, I felt it necessary to go beyond the formal description of intervention procedures and move to a level of detail that would help readers think about how they might apply the various approaches in their own settings.

Using the perspective of community psychology, I chose to organize a book in a way that had each program begin with the context of its use, with special emphasis on the problems it was designed to address, the contexts in which it has been used, and the resources needed to carry it out effectively. This was followed by an explication of the key intervention approaches that the writer/practitioners believed accounted for the success of the program. Both in introductory sections of the book and in the context of the chapters, I attempted to link the practitioners' "theory in use" with principles of community psychology. This, in turn, was followed by a presentation of the evidence in support of any of the foregoing points. Finally, for each program, there was a set of detailed, scripted activities comprising what the authors felt would be a valid "sampler," enabling those who are interested to see how the approach actually would work in their settings (Elias, 1993).

Another part of the book contains a section of "troubleshooting," in which individuals implementing social decision making and life skills development approaches across a wide range of middle school settings and with a range of populations went through a process of identifying the most critical implementation questions they have faced. Following this, a "round robin" procedure was used to have the most frequent questions answered by diverse practitioners. The troubleshooting section, then, contains explication of how and what, in as operational a manner as possible, people did in different implementation contexts to get over various barriers to effective practice. Readers have an opportunity to learn, at a level of detail greater than is usually encountered, the following: This is exactly what I did, given these circumstances at the time; here is what you might do, and here is what I think will work in different circumstances. (Certainly, the readers' ability to extrapolate key principles, their knowledge of other contexts, and perhaps direct experience in those contexts will influence the success of their subsequent applications of what they read. To the extent that they are part of a team with diverse experiences, they are more likely to find support for successful implementation — an example of how community psychology principles of team work, collaboration, and

diversity confer an adaptive, ecological advantage. Nevertheless, I submit that even if the circumstances just described are not particularly favorable, the outcome of attempting explicit, well-grounded and clearly conceptualized interventions will serve to improve the level of effective practice over time.)

As I take a closer look at my roles in this particular project, the nature of my contribution is as an amplifier, synthesizer, encourager, cheerleader, networker, communicator, and the like, *for the work of many others.* I played a key role in identifying, integrating, and channeling forward theoretical influences and ideas, relevant current and prior procedures, and the monitoring and sharing of the work done within and outside a particular project. I worked with individuals who did not, for the most part, consider themselves as community psychologists, to bring their exemplary work to their respective domains within education *and* to the field of community psychology. By creating connections between fields and with principles community psychology as a guiding framework, it is possible to shed important light on the details of good work, thereby making it better appreciated and its features more likely to be adopted into other areas.

Parameters of Effective Praxis in Community Psychology

Parameters of effective praxis in community psychology can be derived from many sources, especially the orientation of the field toward an ecological approach to research (Vincent & Trickett, 1983) and examinations of community psychology practice by some of its foremost proponents (e.g., Chavis, 1993; Price, Lorion, Cowen, & Ramos-McKay, 1988; Wolff, 1987, 1994). Some of these parameters can be captured in an easy to remember acronym: GITPL CATP PELATIS RATAUFM HOC CR. Borrowing from the tradition of Lewin (1951), Rotter (1954), and Albee (1982), these parameters can be cast in the form of an equation. The equation attempts to capture the notion that the greater the value of the terms on the right side, relative to what might be optimal or possible in a setting, the more effective one's work will be.

$$\text{Praxis}_{D,H,S} = \frac{\text{GITPL} + \text{CATP} + \text{PEL} + \text{ATIS} + \text{RAT} + \text{AUFM} + \text{HOC}}{\text{C/R}}$$

where GITPL = grounding in the problem and the literature; CATP = clarity about theoretical perspectives; PEL = principles of effective learning; ATIS = appropriate tailored instructional strategies; RAT = relevant

applicable tactics; AUFM = available user friendly materials; HOC = hospitable organizational contexts; C = constraints; R = resources; and D, H, and S refer to the specific developmental, historical, and situational context of the praxis activity.

It is an implicit view of community psychology that ongoing critical self-awareness is a necessary precursor to lasting change; it also appears to be necessary for effective, enduring collaboration. It is a tenet of the field that the energy and direction for solutions for social problems comes from the local level (Cowen, 1977; Price & Cherniss, 1977; Tolan et al., 1990). The history of significant social movements, such as the abolition of slavery, the desegregation of schools, and our wars on poverty, drugs, AIDS, and violence, shows that macrosystem level interventions, while often necessary and potent catalysts, are not sufficient. Community psychologists need to be ready to bring their own energy and willingness to immerse themselves into local settings and contexts, to be patient, to build and extend our ranks through participation, collaboration, and explication (O'Donnell, Tharp, & Wilson, 1993). The praxis equation contains the kinds of considerations that all such work demands, based on our current knowledge.

The first two terms reflect the need to be grounded not only in past work but also in the conceptual underpinnings of what one is attempting. The next four terms relate to the mechanics of creating change. Change involves some kind of education, or reeducation, and some corresponding actions. Much has been learned about techniques for accomplishing this kind of education, although remarkably little of it finds its way into the interventions in the literature, in part because of traditional research design and publication-related constraints. To the extent to which effective learning principles, engaging strategies, consonant behavioral tactics, and adequate supportive materials are not available and used, even the most sound intervention or "practice" ideas have only a small chance of coming to fruition as intended. Further consideration must be given to the organizational context of the work, and the balance of available resources and constraints in the intervention context. Even a cursory look at the equation makes clear the challenge of intervention in contexts of poverty, violence, distrust, and apathy, and the need for much groundwork to be done before embarking on interventions with a hope of lasting success.

The explication aspect of praxis explication refers not only to the capture of the excellence of practice but also to the linkage of that practice to theory, as noted in the praxis equation. Thus, what is brought forward to others contains not only procedures but an attempt to come to an understanding of the principles that undergird and comprise a given example of practice. From this perspective, it is not only necessary to "walk the

talk"; it is necessary to "talk the walk," to explicate practice activities in an articulate and heuristic, generative, instructive, and inspiring manner (Fullan, 1993). So doing provides maps of patterns of change, markers for shifts in the terrain, realistic guideposts, and other forms of anticipatory and reactive guidance for work in particular developmental, historical, and situational contexts — the D, H, S in the praxis equation. The equation also fosters a realistic view of the challenge of change agentry. As a field, the strength and integrity of community psychology is tied to praxis and its explication, as a theoretically linked extension and enrichment of the concept of practice. We can neither mandate nor otherwise coerce change. Rather, the vicissitudes of lasting change represent a collaborative process, in which community psychologists' contributions — and their limits — and those of many others must be acknowledged (Stokols, 1986).

The Critical Role of Action Research

Clearly, it would be folly to assume that the exact conditions that surrounded examples of excellent practice will be replicated in other contexts. Thus, other aspects of the role of participant conceptualizers and praxis explicators are to foster the development of frameworks within which necessary adaptations can be made despite the fluidity of settings, and to monitor settings to see when and how aspects of a program or setting must be shifted to provide desired outcomes in response to changing conditions.

If practice is the action of doing something and praxis is willed action by which a theory or philosophy becomes social action, action research is the methodology that allows the flow and interplay of theory and action to take place. By its nature, action research is cyclic and ongoing; in its orientation toward progress and improvement, action research actually implies more of a spiral than a closed circle. Using action research cautions individuals that the separation of action and research or the removal of either of them will impair the capacity of the theory or philosophy to inform the social action, as well as the reverse (Lykes, 1993; Price & Smith, 1985).

Action research involves entering a system, studying the phenomena of interest (as identified by both the investigator and the host setting), and testing one's understanding by attempting planned change in the system (what Peterson also refers to as "disciplined inquiry," 1991). it incorporates *reflection* and *generativity* as the mechanisms through which theory and action mutually inform one another. Through reflection on the nature and impact of what one does, relative to one's goals, one can derive patterns

to help in future work; through generativity, the products of one's work can be seen, shared, and discussed, thus allowing for input into one's reflection. Clearly, action research methodology and epistemology is an essential part of community psychology (Price & Cherniss, 1977).

Action research is particularly well suited to communities of praxis, which, from a community psychology perspective, should be broadly multidisciplinary and multiconstituent entities. Taken to a broad level, community psychology action research communities of participant conceptualizers and praxis explicators are exemplified in the work done with and by coalitions. As Wolff (1987, 1993, 1994) and Weed (1994) have done with human service agencies and community organizations, others have tried to do with individual classrooms within schools, and then with other professional groupings within and across schools. The creation of working coalitions is the essence of what makes for a successful comprehensive social competence and health education/promotion (C-SCAHE) program within an entire school district (Weissberg & Elias, 1993).

To illustrate the salience of action research, it is useful to review Slaby's (1993) potent example of what can happen when practice and theory become disconnected. In a review of over 200 violence prevention programs, he estimated that perhaps 10 have been evaluated in some substantial way. As he sees it, the problem is that the other 190 programs are based in "wisdom" but need to be based on theory *and research* about the problem, its nature and transmission, and the context of programmatic application. It is not adequate to base programs in one's personal theory about violence and its prevention, with no real check on the extent to which one's approach shares sufficient contextual similarity to the situation one is facing. Further, it becomes highly difficult for others to use a program based on unarticulated conceptual bases; hence, despite a proliferation of violence prevention programs and many declarations by program developers of success, there also is a proliferation of violence.

Slaby insists we begin with explicit theoretical and methodological grounding about the phenomena upon which we want to have impact, with special attention to the contexts in which that impact is desired. This is tantamount to calling for work in violence prevention to be based on both participant conceptualization and praxis explication. Such an approach allows knowledge to be focused as specifically as possible to the context in which it will be applied; this implies that special attention should be given to applications of one's proposed procedures in contexts most similar to those in which one intends to work. Even as these preliminary considerations are met, subsequent, ongoing action research is among the best safeguards for testing, extending, refining, reaffirming, or disconfirming our knowledge in a public context.

Indeed, what turns action research into participant conceptualization and praxis explication is the process of carefully chronicling the work done and linking it back to existing theoretical perspectives or creating new ones as needed for explanatory purposes. To accomplish this requires much groundwork, maintenance, coordination, and environmental reconnaissance, enhanced by an interdisciplinary and longitudinal perspective. The outcome of such an approach on individuals in the setting and on the operation of the setting itself creates new contexts in which to study the original phenomena and continue the cycle of research and action. For examples, collaborative relationships are created, as is a concern for developing an enduring structure for implementing programs, with program components that allow for the ongoing monitoring, feedback, and modification of intervention components for varying recipients during changing conditions.

In my own work, the use of this perspective has been operationalized through the Improving Social Awareness-Social Problem Solving Project (SPS). This project sprang from a voluntary collaborative effort between myself and a University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey-Community Mental Health Center (CMHC) at Piscataway Educator-Clinician (John Clabby) and a school principal (Tom Schuyler) involving two experimental and three control fourth-grade classrooms, became a grant-funded project, and evolved into what is now an entity that is, to my knowledge, unique in this country: a fully staffed CMHC unit, on a par with basic clinical services, with its own building and with a mission to work with schools around the nation to help them implement empirically validated social decision making and problem solving programs from an action research perspective.

The combination of participant conceptualization, praxis explication, action research, and environmental reconnaissance has fueled creative applications of our work. Specific applications have emerged from the convergence of community or setting needs and social decision making and problem solving talent — often in the form of undergraduate and graduate practicum students interested in being at the action research vanguard. There are many arenas for this work, as the SPS Unit currently serves approximately 30,000 students each week, in over 24 school districts in New Jersey and in as many states around the country, as well as districts in foreign countries, especially Israel, Australia, and India. Dissemination outside New Jersey is aided by the social decision making approach having been validated by the Program Effectiveness Panel of the U.S. Department of Education's National Diffusion Network as a program of demonstrated educational excellence (Elias & Clabby, 1992).

There is little doubt that our use of a participant conceptualizer and praxis explicator orientation and action research as our organizing framework has allowed us to sustain attention to high fidelity implementation and the processes of effective intervention, for what is now nearly two decades of work. In the majority of these cases, key principles are used as jumping off points for tailored applications, which are then subjected to action research and captured through praxis explication. Our approach has had heuristic purpose for the community psychology field, leading to a variety of descriptive-theoretical (e.g., Commins & Elias, 1991; Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence, 1991; Kress & Elias, 1993; Robinson & Elias, 1993; Rosado & Elias, 1993; Srebnik & Elias, 1993) and empirical studies (Elias & Allen, 1992; Elias & Associates, 1986, 1991; Elias, Gager, & Hancock, 1993; Gager & Elias, under review; Hancock, Gager, & Elias, 1992) related to practice and the generation of specific materials used by others in a variety of school contexts (Elias, 1993; Elias & Clabby, 1992; Elias, Tobias, & Friedlander, 1994; Elias & Tobias, in press; Haboush & Elias, 1993). *Perhaps most significant is that our approach to working with settings makes sense to people; it is oriented toward achieving tangible results in the context of their specific needs, using empirically supported and theoretically grounded procedures, featuring explicit principles that they can own and use. There need not be a member of our team — or other community psychologist — in all settings at all times.*

Community Psychologists as Participant Conceptualizers, Praxis Explicators, and Social Change Orchestrators

An important analogy can be made between participant conceptualization, praxis explication, action research, and the idea of orchestration. Think of a few measures or moments of any work of music you know — show music, orchestral music, opera, jazz, rock, or folk music. Perhaps renditions of "Stars and Stripes Forever," "O Canada," "The Impossible Dream," "Unforgettable," "Dr. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band," "Take the A Train," or "Habenera" come to mind. Think of all of the instruments involved — often as many as 19 in a full orchestra, and numerous voices in a choral work — and think of all of the various musical tunes or lines and accompanying rhythms. These are musical ideas that have to be combined.

Orchestration, especially when combined with composing, but not necessarily so, is about choosing and planning. When one considers all of the choices — dare we think of them as variables — that one must make to select one's resources and deploy them to maximal effect, it is clear that

it is not possible to examine all combinations that can be created. Further, when the conductor adapts the orchestration to a particular orchestra and context — in an attempt to preserve the original, intended impact, or at least to maximize it in a current situation — modifications are made. For example, the French Horn, which is exceedingly difficult to play well, may be hidden somewhat or used to direct the listener's attention away from an orchestral weak spot.

Bernstein (1992) summarized good orchestration in a way that Kelly (1979) would like: "The right music played by the right instruments at the right time in the right combination" (p. 71). But it is not that simple, because getting to that point is not a static process. The work must be played and then heard and modified until the composer is satisfied that the basic structure is sound. Then, it is "debuted" under well-controlled circumstances. Then, it might be ready for distribution to others, who, if they are willing to put in the work and duplicate not only the structure but the intention of a given work, might have successful performances. The thrill and challenge of conducting one's own compositions and orchestrations can be likened to a program developer implementating his or her own program. Imagine also the frustration as one sees limits in the playing context that detract from the potential impact, or sees one's composition poorly orchestrated and/or misplayed by others.

Neither the research nor intervention areas of community psychology have come up with the kind of notation that allows for replication in the way that music can be replicated, but there is much to be learned from this example. If we say that our enterprise is more complex than music and defies such reductionism, then we must acknowledge that we have underestimated and undersold the nature of our work; if we feel that music is more complex, then we must ask ourselves to make progress in the area of notation. But ours is a young field, and so we need to be forgiving of ourselves even as we grapple with these difficult questions.

The analogy to orchestral work and orchestration allows a linkage to be made with community psychologists' exciting work with coalitions. Such work provides an important model for extending the reach of individual community psychologists, as well as key roles. Tom Wolff, Bev Long, Betty Tableman, David Chavis, and John Morgan have made creating, supporting, fixing, and even directing coalitions a significant part of their work; in recent years, this has been an important implicit basis of the recognition of distinguished contributions to the practice of community psychology. But in each case, these individuals have done more than their own practice; they have been praxis explicators, adding to general knowledge via presentations, publications, workshops, newsletters, and the like.

Coalitions need sound orchestration, and it is important that processes related to orchestration not be misconstrued as "elitist" or "controlling." Coalitions, and orchestration, require collaboration and partnership. Community psychologists who are involved in social change orchestration need not also be the conductors, and there need not be only one orchestrator. *What must be recognized is that many change efforts, preventive interventions, community collaborations, and the like, including those that mobilize much individual talent and good will, fail for lack of proper orchestration.* Community psychologists can bring valued perspectives in areas such as systems analysis, resource coordination, social ecological and developmental analyses, promotion of competencies, and intervention design, management, and evaluation. At the same time, community psychologists must be prepared to be educated about, by, and in the contexts in which the coalition work takes place. Regardless of the type of community setting, whether classrooms, organizations, support groups, or neighborhoods, a shared vision and a commitment to work together until this shared vision takes place is necessary but not sufficient. The community psychologist recognizes that a critical role in the ultimate success of coalition work is making sure that instruments are heard, sounds are blended, and that what is happening is being explicated, preserved, shared, and invoked not only for the setting but for future work in related settings.

Maximizing our Limited Personpower: Roles for Community Psychologists

Coming full circle, it is clear that the personpower crisis in community psychology has its solution in part in creating roles for community psychologists that are synergistic and capitalize on networking and coalition processes. Price's (1983) discussion of multiple roles needed for success in prevention efforts provides a useful model for elucidating community psychology roles. Some will be participant conceptualizers or praxis explicators within coalitions and other intervention contexts. Ideally, an increasing number of community psychologists will combine the roles of participant conceptualizer and praxis explicator, working to maximize the competence of specific settings while also capturing what is going on and relating it to others in the context of relevant theory and applications in related settings. A given individual may make action research a part of, or separate from, these roles. Finally, some will be social change orchestrators, combining diverse roles and exercising a leadership function. We have exemplars of these in our field, and their methods would benefit from much greater scrutiny and explication. Tom Wolff, Betty Tableman, Bev Long, Emory Cowen,

Rick Price, Ray Lorion, Stan Schneider, John Morgan, Tom Gullotta, Joe Galano, Seymour Sarason come to mind as I look at the materials around me at the moment, and I hope the reader is chastising me for not mentioning dozens more people.

DIRECTING OUR EFFORTS IN COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY

Even as we consider the possibility of expanding the role of community psychologists, it is the case that the number and nature of problems that might command our attention are overwhelming. How can the 1,500 or so community psychologists around the world make a difference, even working in the context of coalitions? In the face of poverty, unemployment, racism, violence in our homes, schools, and neighborhoods, inequitable access to services, lack of services, and a myriad of other problems, is community psychology being too laid back? Has our field been co-opted? Do we need, as Chavis (1993) suggested in his address accepting the award for contributions to practice in community psychology, more anger and fire?

These questions require much more discussion than can be given here. However, they raise an issue relevant to excellence in practice and to the praxis explication role of community psychologists. Paradoxically, the severity of the problems in communities requires us to be both more strategic in choosing where to work, but also more patient in that work.

We need to work within communities in sophisticated, action research oriented, politically skillful ways, and inspire others to work on their own behalf. We need to become better at creating coalitions, be more comfortable with and skilled at the role of social change orchestrator, and become more visible practitioners of participant conceptualization, praxis explication, and action research guided by the principles and values of community psychology. If the choice, as framed by Serrano-Garcia (1993), is to survive respectably or evolve committedly, then I opt for evolving committedly, with part of that commitment being to the integrity of community psychology's guiding principles.

When we look at the problems around us, we must not allow the variables and constructs and polite, scientifically acceptable, terms that have evolved, to disguise the operations of oppression in so much of what we see. This is a matter that cuts to the heart of community psychology's concerns: amidst all the coping, all the networking, all the resilient action of so many, it must be recognized that these heroic efforts in the face of ongoing oppression divert people from contributing to their families, neighborhoods, workplaces, and society in general in ways that they otherwise might.

In fact, we all suffer from oppression's existence; it is not a matter of whether or not we are directly affected. In the context of my own Jewish identity, it is clear that those who, historically, stood by during the oppression of Jews throughout the millennia were not untouched by their experience. They, too, had to divert valuable, productive energy to the task of coping with living in the midst of oppression and giving that oppression tacit, or active, approval. How much energy has the United Stated diverted in matters related to oppression, especially slavery and its still-continuing sequelae? We need to look more carefully and deeply at our work and how, as participant conceptualizers and praxis explicators, we can focus on the greater commonalities that undergird our efforts, and try to position our work so that it is in touch with those commonalities.

The implication of this is to recognize that community psychologists will spend at least part of their time functioning at macrosystemic, or at least organizational, levels. Consider school-based social problem solving and related efforts. When these and related "skills" interventions work, one can see the hand prints of a community psychology perspective. Whether by design or as a fortuitous by-product, students and staff and sometimes parents have been brought together to learn from their strengths and similarities and then moved on to explore their differences and areas they would like to improve. This is one of several reasons why, in our work in social problem solving, we do not begin with identifying the problem; we begin with feelings, with reaching out to a common human quality. Our *intention* is to help classrooms become communities of feeling, thinking, committed human beings, characterized by personal understanding and respect of and for those around them, and based in shared reality: we all have been happy, frightened, sad, upset, disappointed, proud. Though our reasons may have differed, we need to understand each others' reasons and move from there. Members of communities need to think about their experiences, goals, and learnings, and what talents and interests they bring to their classrooms, schools and workplaces, families, and neighborhoods.

This is what makes community psychology-inspired social problem solving and ICPS and related programs so difficult to replicate when absorbed from a journal article. The humanity exuded by Myrna Shure and George Spivack and Weissberg, Gesten, and Cowen and their colleagues, and the overt democratic egalitarian philosophy that is part of the Child Development Project in San Ramon cannot be disentangled from the effects of the specific programs their teams work with. Nevertheless, the interaction of values, action, and research does not preclude our being able to disaggregate, explain, and understand the contributions of each aspect. *Indeed, this is one of the special and important gifts of community*

psychologists, as participant conceptualizers and praxis explicators. We must capture many facets of what is taking place and convey those so that genuine "replication" is possible. Meanwhile, as we keep an eye on the commonalities that link our work — the role of communities, the devastation of oppression, a sophisticated understanding of the role and impact of culture on socialization and competence, the recognition of the importance of enhancing human potential and of creating more health and growth-enhancing environments toward which people's adaptive energies can be directed — the knowledge base in our field will grow enormously, and its sharability for the purpose of improving "practice" in a variety of settings will be correspondingly large.

Coda

In my award address, I noted that I have drawn some inspiration from the work of Jim Henson, among whose creations is Kermit the Frog. When one looks at Henson's work, it is clear that he deserved an honorary SCRA membership. His creations are a celebration of diversity, of inclusion, of strengths — they are a blend of humanity, with Kermit as the chief community psychologist and on-stage orchestrator, doing on television what Jim Henson did in reality. Humans can look to Kermit the Frog as a model of positive consistency, as a patient, wise synthesizer, a consummate participant conceptualizer who recognized strengths and blended diversity and eccentricity (think of all the different Muppets) with a sense of acceptance and provision of meaningful roles. In response to a blend of humor, music, and caring, the Muppets' weekly global viewing audience has reached as high as 200 million. One can see similarities in how Jim Henson and Leonard Bernstein worked. They used their respective media to evoke and create the range of feelings that humans experience. But their goal was that positive, respectful, contributory feelings predominate and that the urge to come together to share in our common humanity — whether alongside a television or at a concert hall — persist.

The various individuals described in the prefatory comments to this paper, researched and written by Jim Kelly and delivered at the award address by Ed Trickett, are all orchestrators and/or conductors with whom I have been privileged to work. I have made it a central concern of mine — perhaps even a bit of an obsession — to take the role of participant conceptualizer and praxis explicator in my work with them. This has enabled me to learn a great deal from them and, in turn, capture what has been done to inform theory, research, teaching, and other work in areas in which these individuals are engaged. SCRA's recognition of my contributions in

these and related arenas has given me the opportunity to share processes and musings about community psychology "practice" that may allow others to follow similar paths and, especially, develop the sketchy ideas presented here, if they so choose.

The work of being a participant conceptualizer and praxis explicator, action researcher, and social change orchestrator is everyday work for the lunchpail-carrying community psychologist. To borrow once more from Kermit the Frog,[4] it may not be easy being green, but green is what I want to be.

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[4]At the conclusion of the award address, I played, and Kermit the Frog lip-synched, Kermit singing, "(It's Not Easy) Bein' Green," from "The Muppet Show" record, 1977.

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