Challenges in Inclusive Research

Allison Tom
University of British Columbia

As qualitative researchers, we have been increasingly attracted to incorporating techniques that increase the involvement of former research subjects in research projects. This attraction springs from a deepening understanding of the importance of the human relationships we create with those we study. Such increased inclusivity, however, has not proven to be easy. My experiences as director of a large collaborative ethnographic evaluation project are examined in light of the conflicting pulls I experienced between the desire to create more inclusive research and the simultaneous limits on the possibilities for certain kinds of players to be fully involved. The roles of university researcher, program administrator, teacher, and learner in two adult education programs are examined in terms of the possibilities for and limitations on inclusivity.

En tant qu'adeptes de la recherche qualitative, nous avons été attirés de manière croissante vers des techniques d'incorporation qui augmentent l'implication de sujets de recherches passées dans nos projets de recherche. Cette attraction découle d'une compréhension qui s'approfondit en regard de l'importance des relations humaines que nous créons avec ceux que nous étudions. Une telle inclusivité accrue, cependant, n'a pas été prouvée comme étant facile. Mes expériences en tant que directeur d'un large projet collaboratif d'évaluation ethnographique sont examinées à la lumière des forces conflictuelles que j'ai vécues entre le désir de créer une recherche plus inclusive et les limites simultanées quant aux possibilités pour certains types de partenaires d'être complétement impliqués. Les rôles du chercheur universitaire, de l'administrateur de programme, de l'enseignant, et de l'apprenant sont examinés pour deux programmes d'éducation pour adultes, ceci en termes de possibilités et de restrictions envers l'inclusivité.

As qualitative research has developed, researchers have been increasingly confronted with contradictions between their methods and the nature of the data they want to gather. Many qualitative researchers have been led by their political and philosophical commitments to embrace research methods that more fully include those they study in the research process. As these inclusive methods mature, however, there are not only benefits:

paradoxes and challenges in such practices have emerged to stand beside the obvious benefits of increased inclusivity. In particular, many researchers are now reflecting on earlier assumptions that, as Shields and Dervin put it, "more is always more" (1993, p. 70). Many of the difficulties encountered by researchers in this tradition may be understood in terms of overly ambitious expectations for more inclusive research.

In this paper I discuss how some of the conflicts I experienced as the director of a large collaborative research project can be understood as unacknowledged struggles with the need to limit inclusion in a framework that began with inclusion as a fundamental value. I first discuss the motivations behind some researchers' desire for more inclusive research methods and then reflect on some of the rewards and difficulties that have faced those who have undertaken collaborative research. I then introduce the literacy research project and discuss the challenges of inclusivity I encountered in relationships with program administrators, teachers, and students.

Motivations for Changed Research Relationships

Four challenges have particularly pushed qualitative researchers to rethink and reshape the way we approach our task of gathering and understanding social knowledge. First, we challenged positivist understandings of objectivity that seemed to demand a distance between researcher and researched. We now recognize that it is ludicrous to attempt to gather social information in relationships that deny or limit our informants' ability to express their sense of themselves as social individuals. Levin summarizes: "This issue has often been expressed as a refusal to treat those being studied as 'subjects' or 'objects'"(1993, p. 332). Reason similarly argues that earlier research methods that exclude subjects "invalidate any claim the methods have to be a science of persons" (1994, p. 325; see also Kushner & Norris, 1980; Leitko & Peterson, 1982; Tierney, 1993; Wolf, D., 1996).

A second motivation comes out of the recognition that researchers have never created their research projects by themselves. Sanjek (1993) demonstrates that anthropologists have always worked with assistants native to the culture they study but only rarely acknowledged the contributions of their assistants. "While professional ethnographers – usually white, mostly male – have normally assumed full authorship for their ethnographic products, the remarkable contribution of these

assistants – mainly persons of colour – is not widely enough appreciated
or understood" (p. 13). Likewise, Gudeman and Riviera, through their
commitment to working with each other as a team, articulate their
conviction that anthropology, like culture, is created within community.
"Culture is made by a community of people .... [It] is the teamwork of
many, and so is ethnography, for it involves the cultures of several.
Collaborative fieldwork is one way of making apparent that ethnography
is a joint making" (1995, p. 245).

Third, many researchers have come to acknowledge the political
motivations behind their interest in the social world and are striving to
match their methods with their political aspirations. Levin summarizes
this motivation as researchers' sense of "moral obligation not just to
study, but also to act in the interests of those they study. Research is seen
to be a part of the political world where solving problems is as important
as identifying them" (1993, p. 332). Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1993)
articulate their commitment to teacher research as political in two ways:
it connects their own professional and personal lives and it creates
research relationships with teachers that stimulate social change. Lather
(1991) likewise espouses empirical work as a political opportunity because
participants, with self-reflection and deepened understanding of their
personal situations, move toward initiating social change as a result.

Finally, the attempt to make research more immediately useful puts us
in conflict with academia because of differences between the products
demanded by applied and academic environments. D. Wolf (1996), for
example, argues that if researchers are to work with changed
understandings of the purposes and methods of research, they must also
challenge academic norms for evaluating that work. Reason (1994)
specifically explains how, for participatory researchers, participants'
interest in and ability to change their world is the primary goal and "the
articulation of the new forms of knowledge in lectures, articles, and books
is a secondary outcome" (p. 333).

Creating New Research Relationships: Rewards and Challenges

These political and philosophical discontents have given rise to a rich
variety of more inclusive research methods. For the purpose of analysis,
in this paper I distinguish between what I have labelled *participatory* and
collaborative research approaches. As Reason (1994) so ably
demonstrates, participatory research methods are bound by sophisticated

theoretical underpinnings and definitions of structure and task. Participatory research projects are undertaken with the primary goal of producing social change and action. In such projects, the production of academic knowledge is either a secondary or an absent goal (e.g., Lather, 1991).

Collaborative research, the focus of this paper, covers a much more loosely-bound collection of approaches which attempt to create "knowledge which is meaningful and useful *both* for academic purposes *and* to the people in the setting being studied" (Levin 1993, p. 331, emphasis added). I distinguish between participatory and collaborative research in order to highlight the important conflicts that may arise in research projects where academic researchers attempt simultaneously to address community needs and fit within the framework of academic demands.

Collaborative research has yielded a rich harvest of positive experiences and advantages. Working with participants as research partners or as an audience for our work keeps us from writing inaccurate, silly, or distancing things about them. Research and writing must always take those whose lives are portrayed into account as intentional, living humans. Such efforts reduce the likelihood of freezing participants in objectifying language and attitudes (Rosaldo, 1994). Collaborative work is also more genuine because it acknowledges that ethnographic knowledge is always discovered in relationship (Gudeman & Riviera, 1995). Similarly, many researchers have found that working in teams – whether teams of colleagues or teams combining researchers and participants – enriches their thinking and adds a beneficial complexity to the analysis (Benmayor, 1991; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Gudeman & Riviera, 1995; Mercier & Murphy, 1991).

There are, of course, difficulties as well as rewards, and it is to these difficulties that I turn the bulk of my attention. As they are involved in more inclusive research, collaborative researchers face challenges from at least three arenas. The first is the lack of a clear and consistent theoretical base for the work. Second, collaborative research is not always the appropriate tool for every research problem. Third, we encounter difficulties in the actual practices of collaboration.

Lack of Theoretical Models

Collaborative research, as I have already implied, is held together more by an enthusiasm for inclusion and a rejection of earlier research approaches than it is by a strong theoretical tradition. There is no clear agreement on what is meant by collaboration. A common implicit expectation, for example, is that collaboration always requires a collective working structure. Kennedy has reflected on the ways feminists working collaboratively have assumed "that everyone has to do the same amount and same kind of work" (1995, p. 31). Another problematic assumption is that collaborative research transforms participants into researchers. Mercier & Murphy reflect on their unsuccessful attempts to teach community women the techniques of oral history: "we loved doing women's history and believed in its power; the women we interviewed loved and believed in their work. We could work collaboratively, but it was presumptuous to think that all women would or should become historians" (1991, p. 184).

The ideals of collaboration give rise not only to the mistaken assumption that all participants should be included in every task; collaborative researchers have also not yet grappled with the way to make decisions about which *potential* research participants can actually be included in a given research endeavor. Research partners, for example, can include colleagues, graduate students, government advisors, community researchers, service providers (e.g., teachers), organizations representing community groups and service recipients (e.g., students). Different kinds of research partners profoundly affect the nature of the collaborations created (Gibson, 1985).

Finally, the notion of inclusivity is itself problematic. In another context, Elizabeth Spelman (1988) warns white middle class heterosexual feminists about hidden assumptions beneath offers to include or share. We can only share that which we own. Hence, inclusivity based on such sharing may continue rather than halt a sense of proprietorship. Academic researchers searching for ways to include others – research subjects, nonacademic researchers, practitioners, graduate students, and so on – in their research endeavors may be revealing rather than challenging their assumption that research still belongs to them. However, those to whom we issue invitations of inclusivity are not likely to remain in positions of submissive gratitude (Niks, 1995; Hill, 1990). They are more likely to demand increasing power in the research enterprise. Thus, this is an

invitation that ought not to be issued if we are not prepared to live up to it.

Limits of Collaboration

Our opportunities for collaborative research are not unlimited. Neither research itself nor collaborative research is always the most useful response to a problem. Further, opportunities for collaboration may be limited because those we want to collaborate with prefer that we do the research ourselves. Collaborative partners may also be far more concerned with ensuring that researchers do no damage to their organization than in finding ways to participate in the research process (Levin, 1993). Academic researchers' ability to contribute to an organization through collaborative research may be limited when they do not have a permanent stake in an organization because they have fewer ways of making their research useful to those they study (Levin, 1993).

Contentious research sites or results may also limit the possibilities for collaboration. Especially when research participants are vulnerable, the openness required in collaborative research may work against both the interests of participants and the possibilities for gathering reliable data. Research undertaken in settings of government oppression may require the researcher to take full responsibility for the opinions expressed in final reports (Wolf, M., 1996).

Collaborative research is more demanding and unwieldy than more traditional research forms. Collaborative research takes more time. When research results are needed quickly, the time required for working together can be a serious disadvantage (Shields & Dervin, 1993). Collaborative structures may also be too clumsy to move swiftly to respond to new demands or changes in the research environment.

Challenges in Living Inclusivity

Academic researchers who hope to create collaborative research relationships do so in specific contexts. The challenges we face in living inclusivity arise in particular constellations of research purpose, conflicting demands between researchers' and participants' home organizations, time constraints, abilities, and ethical issues.

Research purposes. Different research purposes require or limit the possibilities for inclusivity. For example, if the research purpose is to create and share a life history, the collaboration that is formed will be

limited to one or a few participants and will require the establishment of long term, trusting relationships (e.g., Robinson & Wickwire, 1992; Cruikshank, 1990). Collaborative evaluation, in contrast, makes different demands. Here, if the evaluation is to have a credible public face, researchers must be able to demonstrate that their loyalty to the organization's goals or administrators has not blinded them to what needs to be seen (Greene, 1994). This may require excluding some stakeholders in order to ensure that others are comfortable speaking.

Researchers' and participants' home organizations. The pulls and demands of the organizations to which both researchers and participants belong limit the possibilities of inclusivity in two important ways. First, research participants often have important relationships with each other. These relationships do not end when the research begins; indeed, they are often the focus of the research. Crow, Levine, and Nager (1992) attempted to create a research project in which three researchers collaborated with each other in an interdisciplinary team as well as with university staff and students. They note the difficulties of maintaining so many relationships and the impact of status differences between students and faculty. Clift, Johnson, Holland, & Veal (1992) explicitly question the feasibility of creating collaborative relationships between administrators and staff when there is direct authority of the administrators over staff. Borrero, Schensul, and Garcia flatly maintain that it is "nearly impossible" to simultaneously stay close to both a community or client group and to decision makers (1982, p.129).

Second, researchers and participants have responsibilities in their respective institutions that affect the kinds of relationships they can form with each other. Academic researchers are evaluated and rewarded by their production of traditional academic materials. Feminist researchers, for example, have found that their commitment to community projects leaves them vulnerable to "the way the academy values certain kinds of research and research projects and tends to devalue or even punish a more egalitarian rather than a top-down approach to research" (Wolf, D., 1996, p. 27). Levin speaks clearly about this as well, wondering if "the extent of commitment to a partner is the extent to which we will be regarded with suspicion by the academic community" (1993, p. 338).

Regardless of other goals they may also bring to the research, life in the university demands that academic researchers care about their ability to produce results that can be published in academic journals. Practitioners and other participants may want to participate in research in

order to address immediate and practical problem they face. As Feldman says, "to ask teachers to engage in research that does not have as part of its goals some immediate payback is asking too much" (1993, p. 354). For both researchers and participants, the ability and willingness to be included – and to include others – in research collaboratives is greater when the collaboration supports them in their organizational roles and limited when it does not.

Time. Time pressures become focal points of conflict in research collaboratives both because they express these conflicting reward structures and because collaborative research demands exceptional amounts of time. Where administrators, staff, or clients want to participate in research but lack sufficient time, including them usually requires negotiations with their home organizations (Clift et al., 1992). Such strategies are not panaceas. Some responsibilities cannot be allocated to others, and two part-time jobs are inevitably more than one full-time job. Crow, Levine and Nager discuss how students' ability to be involved in their research project diminished as the academic year progressed and student loads rose (1992). Bickel and Hattrup summarize: "Time is a critical resource in the development of sound collaborations, and leadership tends to underestimate how much time is needed" (1995, p. 50).

Ability. Time is not the only constraint; the possibilities for inclusive research are also strained by differences in ability between team members. First, community members may not be able to do some things that are taken for granted in the academic world. Some members of the communities we want to learn about may not read and write with ease, or may read and write in a language other than English. Others may not share academics' comfort with reading and synthesizing quantities of theoretical materials. Few nonacademic members of communities have been trained in formal research methods. If academic standards for research activities are deemed essential, this will severely limit the possibilities for inclusivity. Without deliberate attention to how ability is thought about, superficial collaborations may be created which mask a continuation of more traditional research relationships (Benmayor, 1991; Lather, 1991; Robinson, 1992).

Second, academic researchers are slow to recognize how inclusivity is shaped by their own strengths and weaknesses. Although academic researchers are usually rigorously trained in orthodox research skills, they have rarely been prepared to participate in egalitarian or collaborative endeavors. Reason points out the range of skills required for more

participative research: "skills that are very different from those of orthodox research ... personal skills of self-awareness and self-reflexiveness, facilitative skills in interpersonal and group settings, political skills, intellectual skills and data management skills" (1994, p. 335). Leitko and Peterson similarly describe the "boundary-spanning" skills required of researchers who wish to build bridges between their worlds and those of their participants (1982, p. 459).

Ethical issues. Finally, inclusivity challenges researchers' traditional interpretation of their ethical obligations (Punch, 1994). Traditional promises of anonymity and confidentiality are based on the assumption that those gathering data are more or less separate from those providing it. Collaborative research teams composed of both insiders and outsiders confound such expectations. Researchers in such teams cannot make and keep effective promises of confidentiality and still have all team members involved in all data analysis (Clift et al., 1992; Niks, 1995).

These measures for anonymity and confidentiality are problematic in collaborative research; they are also inadequate. A deeper question is how and whether more open and egalitarian relationships may drive power differentials underground. Feminists, among others, have been grappling with the ways attempts to equalize relationships fail to transform deeper relationships of privilege. Researchers must be careful not to create an illusion of inclusivity that encourages participants to mistake the research relationship for friendship, unless they are willing and able to put the obligations of friendship above the obligations of research (e.g., Stacey, 1991; Wolf, D., 1996; Punch, 1994).

The Literacy Project

In the rest of this paper, I discuss my experiences with the difficulties of creating inclusivity in the context of what we called "the literacy project." The project was conducted in two programs, the Literacy program of the Invergarry Adult Learning Centre (Invergarry) and the Vancouver Municipal Workplace Language Program (VMWLP).

The literacy research project was intended to evaluate and describe the two programs and to help teachers and administrators reflect on their practice and goals (Fingeret et al., 1994). We also intended to demonstrate how ethnographic research could contribute to program evaluation in literacy and other social programs (Tom et al., 1994). The administrators from Invergarry and the VMWLP initiated the research and solicited

funding from a Canadian federal government literacy program. A teacher was seconded from each program to participate in the research and act as a liaison between the programs and the research project. Our initial, ambitious, research plan called for employment of graduate students as researchers and for the active involvement of learners and teachers in question formation, data gathering, analysis, and presentation and application of results.

The project was guided by an Advisory Committee of 14 members that included, among others, literacy scholars, advocates, and practitioners, and a representative from the government funders. A community organization administered project funds in cooperation with the co-principal investigators and my university. The research team was composed of myself and the other co-principal investigator, the two liaison teacher-researchers, five graduate student researchers, and one graduate student administrative assistant.

In this paper I focus on our attempts to create collaborative relationships between university-based researchers and community participants. Our research project and our ability to be inclusive were structured by the interplay between researchers' and participants' lives. The possibilities for inclusion differed markedly between administrators, teachers, and learners. Our own lives and life circumstances also helped shape what was possible for each of these groups of participants.

University researchers. My own circumstances illuminate. Although I had a strong background in ethnography, had done extensive ethnographic work, and was familiar with and enthusiastic about the possibilities for creating collaborative research, I had not actually done such research before. I had to transform my theoretical knowledge of the challenges of creating alternative working relationships from the abstract to the concrete. In early stages of the research I acted out my understanding of inclusivity as an absence of authority or leadership. I was caught in contradictions between my own knowledge of what needed to be done and my belief that I should not tell others what to do. Niks recounts how jokes in the early days of the team hid a "sense that collaboration meant doing everything together, and that there was no differentiation in roles and responsibilities" (1995, p. 62). She recounts one incident in which I apologize profusely for asking researchers to tell me who they planned to interview. By the later stages of the research, I had developed a flexible leadership style which suited me and other members of the research team.

Over time I learned not only to be more comfortable with the contradictory demands of leadership in a collaborative setting, I also gained skills that were important in helping me create inclusive conversations with others. My fieldnotes recount an incident from the early days of the project when I was anxious and speaking too quickly. One learner leaned forward, looked at me earnestly, and said:

> One of the things I had to learn when I first came here was that I was so scared that I talked really fast and really quietly and the other people here couldn't understand me. Something I've learned here is to talk more slowly.

I and other members of the research team learned to speak more slowly. We learned to express ourselves more clearly. We learned to work with groups whose members had a wide range of abilities and life experiences. We grew in our ability to create genuinely inclusive research.

Our collaboration was strained by the many different results we expected from the project. University researchers, administrators, teachers, and students needed different rewards from their participation. As university researchers, we needed academically valued products. Two members of the project planned to write masters theses based on the data, and as an untenured faculty member, I needed to be able to write academic publications. Administrators needed products that supported them politically as they lobbied for their programs. Teachers were interested in improving their practice. Learners were interested in improving their facility in written and spoken English.

Administrators. Administrators faced significant changes in their roles as the project evolved. They solicited the evaluation project and in the initial stages controlled it completely. The project was their idea, they found the funds to support it, and they solicited competitive bids from different teams of researchers for the work. When our team was awarded the contract, administrators had to share some of the power and relinquish other parts of it. This transition is more obvious and less traumatic in retrospect than it was in the moment. We did not recognize the need to negotiate a clear agreement between co-principal investigators and program directors about what collaboration meant and would look like in this particular situation. We struggled throughout with conflicting and contradictory ideas about the nature of our working relationship.

Administrators' roles in the programs also meant that they could not be included in data collection and analysis. Because the project was an evaluation, we felt – and the administrators agreed – that it was important

to maintain both the appearance and the fact of administrators' separation from the data and analysis. Because of the formal power administrators had over teachers and students, it was also important to provide spaces where teachers and students could speak to members of the research team without a sense of administrators listening in. This was difficult to communicate and to execute. For example, one administrator promised the program secretary that she could transcribe interview tapes on contract and earn extra money. The co-investigators had to ask the administrator to revoke this promise to preserve confidentiality. This was awkward for everyone.

Teachers. The teachers – both liaison researchers and others – also found difficulties in their efforts to be involved in the project; the issues were more intense for the liaison researchers. Teachers' heavy job responsibilities constrained their ability to participate in the project. Liaison researchers were especially pulled between their teaching responsibilities and the research team. Their formal secondments did not release them from a sense of obligation to their students and colleagues. Thus, they tried to carry most of their teaching jobs as well as their research obligations. One liaison researcher found himself trapped in his teaching responsibilities. If he tried to observe rather than teach, even briefly, colleagues or students called on him to help. If he tried to leave the classroom to write, people came to the literacy office to find him. Other teachers were also busy with their teaching and their personal lives – and in many cases, other jobs – and were unable to volunteer much time to the project. Teachers were reluctant to participate in the project when it felt like doing so took time away from their students.

Liaison researchers joined the project with no formal training in the research methods we were using. We were not funded early enough to allow time to work intensively with them on developing their formal research skills or for them to take a research methods class. The principal investigators and graduate students knew how to do academic research. The liaison researchers knew the research site, students, and teachers, and had a deep understanding of the theories beneath their practice. The challenge was to find ways to include and use this knowledge without trapping liaison researchers in subordinate positions either through using them as captive informants or through regarding them as inferior researchers. Our uneasy resolution of this challenge was to teach liaison researchers some of the basics of our research methods. They then used these methods from their perspective as teachers.

For example, all team members wrote field notes. The liaison researchers' field notes were descriptive, as were university researchers', but liaison researchers wrote from the position of insider. I characterized liaison researchers' notes as taking on a tone of "I believe" in contrast to university researchers' notes, which took a tone of "I wonder" or "I watched." The liaison researchers' notes show how powerfully a teacher can reflect on incidents on with which he or she is familiar. For example, one liaison researcher wrote these notes.

> It seemed to me that Bronwyn was feeling her way through this class. She had told me that she had never done a conversation class before – this was her first attempt .... For me this is an important observation because I think this is what makes good learning. Bronwyn did not go into this class with some preconceived notion of what this class was going to be about .... I think as instructors we must take risks. We ask our learners to do this daily. As instructors we can't understand what this means unless we do it ourselves. (McCue, cited in Tom et al., 1994, pp. 106-107)

When they did interviews, likewise, liaison researchers explicitly used – rather than tried to overcome – their position of teacher or colleague.

The presence of liaison members on the team presented us with the most profound ethical challenges in the research. Their participation challenged the traditional notions of confidentiality and anonymity we brought into the research project. One university researcher expressed her awareness of this tension this way:

> My sense of being in the research meetings, because of the presence of the liaison people there, was like I was in the field again. I don't know that it felt unsafe as in feeling dangerous but it felt like there was a certain kind of way that I watched my consciousness. (Jane Dawson, cited in Niks, 1995, p. 102)

Our resolution of these conflicts was often partial or unwieldy. Although other members of the research team analysed and read each other's data, liaison researchers did not work with any data except that they had collected. On occasion, liaison researchers were asked to leave team meetings so other members could discuss field events without revealing students' or teachers' identities. None of us was comfortable with these compromises, although liaison researchers claim less discomfort than the rest of us.

Liaison researchers also knew that when they asked for help with the research project, learners and colleagues were not responding to them as just researchers but as teachers or colleagues. This made liaison

researchers reluctant to ask others, especially learners, to do things for the project out of fear of abusing their power. Sometimes this meant that liaison researchers suggested individuals who might be interesting to include but other team members made the request.

The roles of teacher and learner were clearly differentiated in spite of the relatively egalitarian structures of both programs. We formed what we called consulting groups, composed of both teachers and learners, as places where research questions and research progress could be discussed. Teachers and learners participated in these consulting groups in terms of their prior relationships with each other. Thus, within the consulting groups, teachers remained teachers. They did not use the meetings as opportunities to express their own thoughts, instead, when they participated in the meetings, they helped learners express their thoughts. Learners likewise treated the teachers as teachers rather than as colleagues.

Learners. Like teachers, learners' opportunities for participating in the project were shaped not only by their organizational roles but also by time, ability, and ethical issues. Learners in the Invergarry program were only rarely without other obligations in their lives. Most had some combination of obligations to partners, children, parents, and employment in addition to their studies. Learners at the VMWLP all had full time jobs and usually had domestic responsibilities as well. We were unable to create workable ways to alleviate time pressures in their lives to free them to participate in the research project. We had originally hoped to pay learners for their involvement but could not come up with an equitable and workable way to do this. We also realized that what little we could have paid would not substitute for a regular job (and most held jobs where secondment was a privilege not available to them), time with their families, or improving their literacy skills.

Learners were studying to improve their skills in spoken and written English. We were neither fluent nor literate in the first language of most learners. Our opportunities for sharing the tasks of data collection, analysis, and writing were structured by our mutual limitations. Many traditional communication and research strategies did not work in this setting (e.g., distributing memos to announce meeting dates, exchanging analytic memos, keeping detailed journals, and sharing field notes, transcripts, or report drafts and outlines).

Learners came from all over the world and the programs were both culturally and linguistically diverse. We were confronted with the western

nature of our notion of ethnography and research. To some extent, we were limited by the immensity of the challenge of translating and negotiating this research tradition in an environment of such astonishing diversity. The formal requirements of letters of consent (required by the university) were a particular barrier in including some learners in the research process. Not only did we have difficulties explaining and translating the words and concepts from the letters, some learners came from countries where government oppression was widespread. When we asked them to put their names and signatures on an official document for a project sponsored by the government and a university, we increased their sense of threat rather than assured them of their safety. Some learners said they would talk to us as long as they were not required to sign anything or have their names in any way recorded by the project. We used learners' skills in cultural translation and in communicating across language barriers to bridge some of the difficulties created by these formal requirements. Others remained unbridged.

Conclusions

The opportunities for inclusive research have to be created afresh between researchers and participants in each research project. In our situation, the fact that this was my initiation into the practice – rather than the theory – of collaborative research was one important element. Equally important were the very different needs each kind of participant brought to their contribution to the project. The opportunities for program administrators, teachers, and learners to participate in the project were structured by the demands of their personal and professional lives and by their pre-existing (and more important) relationships with each other. No structures created by the research project could change or overcome these underlying relationships.

These underlying relationships present collaborative researchers with one of the most difficult and profound challenges of this kind of research: establishing a new conception of ethical conduct of research. Our project pushed against, and was limited by, the still unresolved challenges of behaving ethically when old guidelines of confidentiality and anonymity are made impossible by the very structure of the research. Assumptions brought from older traditions of qualitative research failed to support us in this instance. Some newer methods and approaches were equally unhelpful: many of the new techniques for inclusion depend heavily on written material produced by both researchers and participants. Barriers

of language and of the meanings of research and written materials themselves made these techniques inappropriate in our situation. Even complex conversations were difficult when conducted across the lines of many different language backgrounds.

What I knew intellectually then but know viscerally now, and what the heart of this paper is about, is that collaborative research relationships are not cut from a mold. The tension between academics' continuing need for academically valid results and participants' many different needs from the research will continue to pull at every collaborative endeavour. Relationships between participants in their home settings may be different, and create different tensions, in each project, but they will almost certainly continue to make their mark on the shape of the collaboration that is created. Both the literature and my experience – in this and later projects – suggest that time pressures will always be a difficult and important element shaping the possibilities for inclusion. Neither researchers nor participants come ready-made with the abilities required by collaborative research. Likewise, we will have to continue to struggle to create, together and in our separate research undertakings, new understandings of ethical research behaviour to serve us in this new research setting.

The call to collaboration is a call to greater inclusivity in all aspects of research design, execution, and dissemination. Those of us who have been taught to think of research as the property of university-trained researchers are challenged to reconceptualize our approaches and to begin to learn with the people we are interested in, and to create, with them, new ways to enact our commitments. The discussions in this paper have demonstrated that enthusiasm and good intentions are not enough. The call to collaboration demands that we respond to it with both creativity and deliberate care. We must not cling mindlessly to traditional definitions of research tasks; at the same time, we must push ourselves to honour the essence and the best of what has shaped our understanding of research.

Collaborative research demands that we think about research in new and unexpected ways. In my experience, leading with the principle of inclusivity yields great dividends for all involved. If the intent is to create ways of involving as many people as possible, then the challenge of finding ways for them to be genuinely and meaningfully involved is clear. At the same time, collaborative ethnographic research is exhausting and demanding and it is essential that we not make promises we cannot keep.

The call for including as many people – and as many kinds of people – as possible does not mean that we create make-work projects, nor does it allow us to create insincere relationships. If we view collaboration as a deep commitment to creating increasingly *respectful* relationships with people we want to learn about, it becomes clear that we must not create commitments we cannot honor or relationships we cannot sustain. Enthusiasm for inclusivity and connection with the community can quickly lead to a disappointing and embittering string of promises broken because they were too grand to be kept. Our commitment to broadening the circle of collaborative research requires that we do so slowly, and with care, respect, and caution.

REFERENCES

Benyor, R. (1991). Testimony, action research, and empowerment: Puerto Rican women and popular education. In S.B. Gluck & D. Patai (Eds.), *Women's words: The feminist practice of oral history* (pp. 159-174). New York: Routledge.

Bickel, W.E. & Hattrup, R.A. (1995). Teachers and researchers in collaboration: Reflections on the process. *American Educational Research Journal, 32*(1), 35-64.

Borrero, M., Schensul, J.J., & Garcia, R. (1982). Research based training for organizational change. *Urban Anthropology, 11*(1), 129-163.

Clift, R., Johnson, M., Holland, P., & Veal, M.L. (1992). Developing the potential for collaborative school leadership. *American Educational Research Journal, 29*(4), 877-908.

Cochran-Smith, M. & Lytle, S. (1993). *Inside/outside: Teacher research and knowledge*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Crow, G.M., Levine, L., & Nager, N. (1992). Are three heads better than one? Reflections on doing collaborative interdisciplinary research. *American Educational Research Journal, 29*(4), 737-753.

Cruikshank, J. (1990). *Life lived like a story*. Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press.

Feldman, A. (1993). Promoting equitable collaboration between university researchers and school teachers. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 6*(4), 341-358.

Fingeret, H., Tom, A., Niks, M., Dawson, J., Dyer, P., Harper, L., Lee, D., McCue, M., & Morley, A. (1994). *Lives of change: An ethnographic evaluation of two learner-centred literacy programs*. Raleigh, NC: Peppercorn Press.

Gibson, M.A. (1985). Collaborative educational ethnography: Problems and profits. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 16*(2), 124-148.

Greene, J.C. (1994). Qualitative program evaluation. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp.530-544). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Gudeman, S. & Riviera, A. (1995). From car to house (Del coche a la casa). *American Anthropologist, 97*(2), 242-250.

Hill, C.E. (1990). *Writing from the margins: Power and pedagogy for teachers of composition.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Kennedy, E.L. (1995). In pursuit of connection: Reflections on collaborative work. *American Anthropologist, 97*(1), 26-32.

Kushner, S. & Norris, N. (1980). Interpretation, negotiation, and validity in naturalistic research. *Interchange, 11*(4), 26-49.

Lather, P. (1991). *Getting smart.* London: Routledge, Chapman and Hall.

Leitko, T. & Peterson, S. (1982). Social exchange in research: Toward a "new deal." *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 18*(4), 447-62.

Levin, B. (1993). Collaborative research in and with organizations. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 6*(4), 331-340.

Mercier, L. & Murphy, M. (1991). Confronting the demons of feminist public history: Scholarly collaboration and community outreach. In S.B. Gluck. & D. Patai (Eds.), *Women's words: The feminist practice of oral history* (pp.175-187). New York: Routledge.

Niks, M.I. (1995). *Collaborative research: A joint journey.* Unpublished master's thesis, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

Punch, M. (1994). Politics and ethics in qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp.83-98). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Reason, P. (1994). Three approaches to participative inquiry. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp.324-339). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Robinson, V.M.J. (1992). Doing critical social science: Dilemmas of control. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 5*(4), 345-359.

Robinson, H. & Wickwire, W. (1992). *Nature power: In the spirit of the Okanagan storyteller.* Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre.

Rosaldo, R. (1989). *Culture and truth: The remaking of social analysis.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Rosaldo, R. (1994). Whose cultural studies? *American Anthropologist, 96*(3), 524-528.

Sanjek, R. (1993). Anthropology's hidden colonialism. *Anthropology Today, 9*(1), 13-18.

Shields, V.R. & Dervin, B. (1993). Sense-making in feminist social science research: A call to enlarge the methodological options of feminist studies. *Women's Studies International Forum, 16*(1), 65-81.

Spelman, E. (1988). *Inessential woman: Problems of exclusion in feminist thought.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Stacey, J. (1991). Can there be a feminist ethnography? In S.B. Gluck & D. Patai (Eds.), *Women's words: The feminist practice of oral history* (pp.111-119). New York: Routledge.

Tierney, W.G. (1993). The cedar closet. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 6*(4), 303-314.

Tom, A., Fingeret, H., Niks, M., Dawson, J., Dyer, P., Harper, L., Lee, D., McCue, M. & Morley, A. (1994). *Suspended in a web of relationships: Collaborative ethnographic evaluation.* Raleigh, NC: Peppercorn Press.

Wolf, D. (1996). Situating feminist dilemmas in fieldwork. In D. Wolf (Ed.), *Feminist dilemmas in fieldwork* (pp.1-55). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Wolf, M. (1996). Afterword: Musings from an old gray wolf. In D. Wolf (Ed.), *Feminist dilemmas in fieldwork* (pp.215-222). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Allison Tom is Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia, where she teaches about ethnographic research methods and women, work and education. Her primary research interests are in developing feminist and collaborative approaches to research and in exploring the multiple meanings of work and education; she is currently working on a project on child care workers' relationship to their work.