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A Case Study of a Community-Based Participatory Evaluation Research (CBPER) Project: Reflections on Promising Practices and Shortcomings

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This instrumental case study documents a community-based participatory evaluation research (CBPER) project that involved a community partner, two graduate students, a faculty member, and an external funder. It highlights the fact that a participatory evaluation model is a viable way to conduct community-based research (CBR) when a community organization needs to know if the program services they are offering are effective. The identification of the promising aspects and shortcomings of this project advance the theoretical and methodological understandings of the CBR field and promotes better CBR practice.

Community-based research (CBR) is collaborative, change-oriented research that engages faculty members, students, and community members in projects addressing community-identified needs (Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker, & Donohue, 2003). With its roots in action research, participatory research (for a detailed description between the two, see Brown & Tandon, 1983), and popular education, CBR is an important tool in engaging institutions of higher education with local communities (see Strand et al., 2003 for more on the history of CBR and its relationship to the three stated models). Indeed, several academic disciplines, including education (Stocking & Cutforth, 2006), environmental health sciences (O'Fallon & Dearry, 2002), international education (Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005), nursing (Kelley, 1995), occupational therapy (Taylor, Braveman, & Hammel, 2004), planning (Reardon, 1998), public health (Israel, Eng, Schulz, & Parker, 2005; Minkler & Wallenstein, 2003), social work (Rogge & Rocha, 2004), and sociology (Buroway, 2005) have acknowledged CBR's contribution to the paradigm shift toward university-community involvement. Furthermore, the growing recognition of the potential of CBR to address complex community needs is recognized by the insistence on forming CBR partnerships contained in grant guidelines from federal agencies (e.g., the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Outreach Partnership and the Center for Disease Control's Prevention Research Centers Program) and other funding sources.

With CBR, the research issue and question originate with the community. Often times, community organizations want to know if their programs are "working." In these cases, program evaluation can become part of the CBR paradigm. Evaluation research is defined as the systematic application of social research procedures in assessing social intervention programs (Rossi & Freeman, 1993). Community-based researchers can use evaluation models such as *participatory evaluation* (Patton, 1997a; Stoecker, 1999) or *empowerment evaluation* (Fetterman, 1994a; Fetterman, 1994b; Stoecker) to help guide the community organization through the evaluation process. The CBR project that is described in this article aligns more with the participatory evaluation model, which is really an extension of the stakeholder-based model with a focus on enhancing evaluation utilization through the primary user(s)' increased participation in the research process (Cousins & Earl, 1992). The principles of participatory evaluation can be summarized as follows: (a) involve participants at every stage of the research process; (b) make sure the participants own the evaluation; (c) focus the process on the outcomes the participants think are important; (d) facilitate participants to work collectively; (e) organize the evaluation to be understandable and meaningful to all; (f) use the evaluation to support participants' accountability to themselves and their community first and outsiders second, if at all; (g) develop the evaluator role as a facilitator, collaborator, and learning researcher; (h) develop participants' roles as decision makers and evaluators; (i) recognize and value participants' expertise and help them to do the same; and (j) minimize status differences between the evaluation facilitator and participants (Patton; Stoecker).

Research that is firmly based in the community is an important component of the community engage-

ment movement and with increased awareness, the participatory evaluation approach can be a vehicle through which communities can become further engaged in the programs which serve them. The practical challenges of conducting research in and with a community, such as unrealistic goals and timeframes, minimal resources, a lack of personal investment, and methodological challenges associated with recruiting participants (Stocking & Cutforth, 2006; Strand et al., 2003; Willis, Peresie, Waldref, & Stockmann, 2003), can make any CBR project difficult to execute and complete; a CBR study whose purpose is to evaluate a program serving that community is no different. Through an instrumental case study design[1] (Merrian, 1988; Yin, 2003), we describe and interpret a series of steps and sequence of activities that led to a particular community-based participatory evaluation research (CBPER) project's success and failure. Specifically, we address the following two questions: first, what worked and what did not with this CBPER project, and second, what lessons can be learned from a promising, but imperfect, CBPER experience that might be extended to CBR generally? By addressing these questions, the case study contributes to the dialogue in the field regarding best practices of CBR.

This article contains six sections. The first section introduces, in a narrative fashion, the CBPER project which is the subject of this case study; describes the project's primary stakeholders; and documents how the project unfolded (including how stakeholders shaped its conception and design, collection and analysis of data, and the dissemination of the results). The second section discusses the overall impact of this project. The third section considers promising aspects of this CBPER project, while the fourth section considers shortcomings with the project. The fifth section identifies lessons learned for future research, and the sixth section discusses the implications of this case study to the field of CBR. In general, this case study shows how open dialogue can occur when academics and community partners listen to and value the particular expertise each brings to the project. The result is the creation of a level playing field, which enables each partner to be full participants in each phase of the work. The identification of the factors that contributed to the success and failure of this project will inform professors and students as they launch their own CBR projects, and thus, enrich students' education and serve the needs of the community.

The Project

Narrative

Visitors approach an old Victorian house, nestled into a side street, just blocks away from one of the busiest avenues of the city. The painstakingly restored old house is the home of the Spring Institute and its WorkStyles program. WorkStyles is a two-week, intensive, pre-employment training class for newly arrived refugees. The occasion for this visit is a graduation ceremony: the 188th class of WorkStyles is just ending, and it is time to celebrate. One of the visitors writes:

> I am greeted at the door by a mix of invited guests, Spring Institute management and staff, and some of the students from the graduating class. The atmosphere… is one of excitement and anticipation. I can feel that it is a special day, not only for the students but also for those who make all they do here possible. A warm afternoon light fills the foyer and I am made to feel right at home by all who welcome me….
>
> People of many races and nationalities mingle together as we all begin to take our seats. I feel the sense of being part of something large and hopeful. An older gentleman from Sierra Leone who is one of the graduates stands in front of the full room and greets guests and graduates as the ceremony begins. He is dressed in beautiful African robes and cap and he seems to carry the dignity of his countrymen with ease and comfort. After welcoming all, he opens the ceremony with a prayer and …lay[s] out the afternoon's events.

As the graduation ceremony begins, the observer continues:

> First, comes the introduction of all the graduates. As they stand one by one, they tell a little about themselves and their countries of origin: Burma, Eritrea, Vietnam, Sierra Leone, and more. One by one they thank those at the Spring Institute who made this course possible. Their English proficiency varies, but not the gratitude they share with those in attendance. Blessings are offered by many, to the institute, the instructors, and to all those seated in front of them.
>
> Next [comes] entertainment provided by the graduates…especially moving is a performance by a gentleman from Vietnam. He greets the crowd and explains in broken English that he spent 14 years in a refugee camp in the Philippines before arriving in America 2 months ago. He says he wants to sing a song he wrote about what he had been through to get to America. A guitar is passed forward, and as he begins, I can feel the perseverance and pride that sustained him through his ordeal. I am almost moved to tears.
>
> Soon after, all in attendance who have yet to introduce themselves do so. There are people from other nonprofit organizations, prior graduates from the institute, institute staff and man-

> agement, as well as individuals who have provided funding over the years…I feel honored to be amongst a group of people who give so much to better the lives of others. Although attendees are of many differing races and nationalities, a pride and unity fill the room as they share in the celebration of the graduates. Finally, the diplomas are passed out and a few words of closing are offered before we all join together in a song that marks the end of the ceremony. It is time to enjoy the potluck of food and fortune …provided by the graduates of the 188th WorkStyles class.

This "visitor" is actually a researcher who participated in a CBR study; the above passage is excerpted, with minimal changes, from his field notes on the last day of his observation. The central purpose of the study was to evaluate the impact of the WorkStyles program upon the short-term employment of its graduates. The Colorado Refugee Services Program (CRSP)—the main funder of WorkStyles—requested and funded the evaluation study. The study was conducted under the auspices of the Colorado Community Based Research Network (CCBRN), housed at the University of Denver. The actual researchers—the observers who created field notes (such as those excerpted above), the interviewers who spoke to program participants, trainers, and community agencies, and the quantitative researcher who analyzed employment data of refugees who participated in WorkStyles as compared with those who did not—were five University of Denver graduate students. Two of the students (co-authors of this article) took the lead in designing and implementing the qualitative and quantitative portions of the study, under the general supervision of a professor (also a co-author) specializing in CBR.

However, the composition of the study team extended beyond the University. The Director of CRSP (funder and another co-author) played a role in the project by providing valuable input and feedback, especially at the beginning and end stages of the project. And, more pivotally, members of the WorkStyles staff, especially its Employment Training Manager (another co-author) and trainers who are themselves refugees and had participated in the WorkStyles program as new arrivals in the U.S., were integrally involved as community partners in every stage of the study (from planning/design, to data collection, to reviewing and providing substantive input on draft reports and conclusions). Thus, members of very different communities—a state refugee service program, a university, a local pre-employment refugee training program, voluntary agencies (VOLAGs) who case manage the refugees, and the refugees themselves—collaborated to produce a CBPER study.

Stakeholders

The authors of this article represent the primary stakeholders (see Figure 1), who are described below.

The Community Partners

CRSP. The Colorado Refugee Services Program (CRSP) is the Division of Refugee Services in the Office of Self Sufficiency of the Colorado Department of Human Services. The goal of CRSP is to achieve effective resettlement and rapid self-sufficiency for all refugees in Colorado. CRSP is responsible for the submission and implementation of Colorado's State Plan for refugee resettlement, which is approved and funded by the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement. CRSP provides state leadership, networking, consultation, supervision, and monitoring on behalf of the many public and private agencies in Colorado that serve refugees, either as part of a specific caseload funded by contracts with CRSP, or as part of a larger mainstream caseload funded by other sources. The authority for the work of CRSP is found in the Refugee Act of 1980.

The Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning. The Spring Institute is a Denver-based nonprofit founded in 1979 to promote intercultural sharing and communication as a contribution to a more peaceful world. Their principal goal is to demonstrate that national, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic differences are assets that foster understanding and cooperation. The Spring Institute provides direct services, technical assistance, training, and consulting services regionally, nationally, and internationally. Programs include English Language Training in different business and community settings: Employability Services; Intercultural, Cross-cultural, and Diversity Training; Interpretation and Translation Services; Community Integration; and Interpreter Training.

The Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning started WorkStyles in 1985. Funded through the Federal Refugee Social Services and Targeted Assistance Grant programs, WorkStyles is designed for non-native English speakers, specifically, to address the barriers to learning created by lack of confidence and self-esteem. To date, it has more than 220 programs. WorkStyles is a two-week, 60-hour intensive course focusing on pre-employability and personal effectiveness skills and is designed to help individuals obtain, retain, and become successful in employment. Its training staff includes members of the refugee community who have first-hand experience of the challenges of entering into the unfamiliar U.S. work force culture, and who themselves graduated from the WorkStyles program. The overall program includes developing resumes, completing application forms, practicing interviews, and making

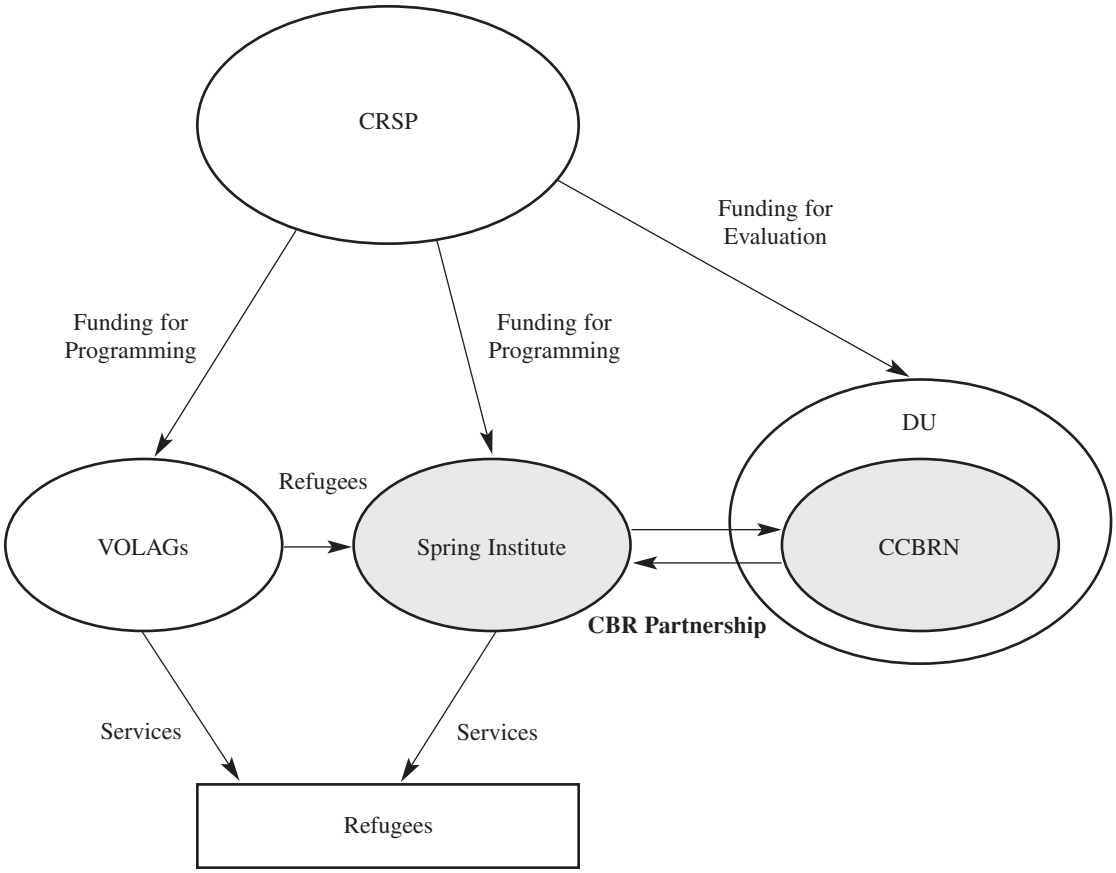
phone calls about jobs, as well as setting goals, identifying skills, understanding American work culture, and solving problems on the job. WorkStyles employs a variety of strategies which help to reinforce self-confidence by encouraging people to share their knowledge and experience: videotaped role plays, brainstorming activities, skits to demonstrate cross-cultural situations, small-group problem solving, and individual exercises (Michienzi, 2003). As people participate in these activities, they take risks, and they gain confidence in their ability to use their verbal English skills in new and unfamiliar situations. The program starts with the assets, skills, and talents that refugees bring to the job market in the United States and then moves out into practical strategies refugees can use for successfully applying those skills to finding and maintaining employment and building careers.

The University Partner

The university partner in this project was the Colorado Community-Based Research Network (CCBRN) housed in the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver (DU). The CCBRN is a clearinghouse that connects the research needs of community partners (i.e., schools, nonprofits, social agencies, and community-based organizations) with the skills and interests of university researchers (i.e., professors and graduate students) (Stoecker et al., 2003). Funding from local and national foundations and state agencies enables graduate students and professors to conduct up to a dozen CBR projects each year that address community-identified needs in the fields of education, public health and nutrition, and environmental justice. The majority of these projects involve qualitative, quantitative and/or mixed methods evaluation of new or existing programs; however, needs assessments, oral history projects, and exploratory research studies have also been undertaken (for details see www.ccbrn.org).

These projects provide opportunities for graduate students to hone their CBR knowledge and skills through a pathway of CBR opportunities that progress from course-based, introductory, and faculty-supervised experiences to increasingly sophisticated and self-directed assignments. This pathway

Figure 1
The Relationship of Communities Involved in the CBPER Project



begins with a class in which students are introduced to the principals and practices of CBR and are required to design and implement a research project with a community partner. Students wishing to deepen their CBR experience with community partners can enroll in a CBR practicum class (one quarter), and then participate in a paid CBR internship (up to a year). Paid research opportunities (such as the one described in this article) exist for students with the prerequisite experiences and skills. Finally, students who are considering CBR as a potential career can utilize the approach in master's theses and doctoral dissertations (Stocking & Cutforth, 2006).

As previously mentioned, there were members of multiple communities (the refugees, VOLAGS, CRSP, the Spring Institute, and CCBRN) that were involved in this project at some level; however, while recognizing the contributions of all stakeholders in this evaluation study, this article focuses on the partnership between the Spring Institute and the CCBRN (See Figure 1) due to each partner's central involvement in identifying the research questions, research design, and data collections tools, and then collecting and analyzing the data and disseminating the results.

Project Conception and Deliberation

Consistent with the principles of CBR (Strand et al., 2003), the initial seed of an idea for this evaluation project originated within two of the community partners: the CRSP and the Spring Institute/WorkStyles. The managers and coordinators of the WorkStyles program had begun to ask themselves how they could figure out whether WorkStyles was being successful in its mission. Specifically, they wondered what measures of success they could use. Anecdotal information led them to believe that the program was indeed successful. For instance, program graduates would come back and talk enthusiastically about their lives; employers would report positive experiences with new hires who had been through the program; and the VOLAGs who case-managed the refugees continued referring them to WorkStyles without reservation. WorkStyles staff also conducted a survey of past participants, case managers, and employers to understand some of the positive long-term benefits of the program. This survey consisted of the WorkStyles trainers interviewing former students and colleagues; it yielded data that warranted further follow-up. However, the Spring Institute personnel felt that they lacked not only impartiality, but also the technical skills to create and implement specific evaluative measures so that a true picture of the successes (and failures) of WorkStyles might be presented to the outside world.

As a first step toward an evaluation, the WorkStyles program manager approached the third author, the coordinator of the CCBRN, to find out if funding could be acquired to craft a meaningful and rigorous evaluation of WorkStyles. Somewhat coincidentally, and soon after the initial meeting between WorkStyles and CCBRN, the director of CRSP informed the WorkStyles program manager that he was interested in mirroring on a small scale a multiple site federal study that also was focusing on employment outcomes, to determine if the learning from and use of an evaluation would be less meaningful because of limited statistical power. Also, as the state agency authorized to develop and implement the State Plan for refugee resettlement that is approved and funded by its federal partner (the Office of Refugee Resettlement), the CRSP was in a position to use the information gained from this small scale evaluation to influence public policy as it pertained to the development, measurement, and positioning of programs intended to achieve rapid self-sufficiency for refugees. The CRSP director wanted to know if WorkStyles could get such an evaluation done with $8,000 of available funding, and the WorkStyles program manager immediately referred him to the CCBRN. These preliminary contacts led to a series of meetings, attended by representatives of CRSP, WorkStyles, and CCBRN, to work on the project. CRSP's funding would enable the DU graduate students associated with CCBRN to be paid for their time. The purpose of the meetings was to decide on the research questions, measures, and methods.

Project Design

In this series of initial meetings, as well as through numerous e-mail conversations, these participants (partners) crafted a design for the evaluation study with careful consideration of the needs of the funder (CRSP), the lead community partner (Spring Institute/WorkStyles), and the university (CCBRN/DU). At this early stage, the funder was focused solely on obtaining a clear picture of WorkStyles' success/failure through quantitative research methods. Specifically, the funder was interested in answering the research question "Does WorkStyles impact short-term employment outcomes for refugees?" To meet the funder's need, one of the lead doctoral students on the project—in the dual role of the quantitative expert and project manager—collaborated closely with WorkStyles staff to design a quasi-experimental, matched control group study. A matched control design "matches" similar subjects from two groups (WorkStyles and a control group of refugees who had not attended WorkStyles) on key attributes. The lead community partner's expertise (i.e., the understanding of what factors or attributes were appropriate and feasible for matching groups of refugees) and the expertise of the university partner (i.e., knowledge of quan-

titative methodology), dovetailed nicely to produce an initial quantitative study design that pleased the funder and, in part, the community partner.

The lead community partner, however, had some reservations from the very beginning about whether this kind of study would (or could) present a meaningful picture of WorkStyles. The WorkStyles' manager believed that it would be difficult to find an association between the WorkStyles program and early employment outcomes. He described his reasoning in the following way:

> One, it's a two-week program that takes people out of the job search even though we're teaching them job preparation skills… and two we don't have any control over their job placement…we're just a training organization…[job placement] is not part of our funding.

If left to him, the WorkStyles manager would have chosen long-term employment outcomes for the study. However, this choice would have required at least an 18-month study, and the funder's requirement was that the study be completed within the fiscal year, affording only a 9-month time frame. As such, the community partner concluded that they needed "some other data that at least gives some evidence of the [non-quantifiable] successes."

To that end, it was agreed that a qualitative dimension be introduced to the project design. The funder was not opposed to this; in fact, he was even intrigued by the possibility. However, he remained interested primarily in the quantitative results. Nonetheless, the qualitative portion forged ahead. A second lead doctoral student with a qualitative research focus was added to the team, and the student and the WorkStyles manager collaboratively constructed a qualitative design. It combined intensive observation of WorkStyles training sessions with the refugees, interviews of VOLAG representatives who referred refugees to the WorkStyles program, two focus groups of loosely matched comparison groups of refugees,[2] and a final focus group of the WorkStyles trainers. The objectives of the qualitative methods component of the study were two-fold: first, to address the question of whether WorkStyles helped refugees obtain early employment as well or better than comparable programs; and second, to provide a more nuanced picture of the impact the WorkStyles program was having in aiding refugees to adjust to their new lives and work situations in the United States. The university partner was able to contribute to these objectives not only through the efforts of the lead qualitative doctoral student researcher, but also through a graduate-level CBR class, taught by the third author, which was serendipitously scheduled to commence soon after the time at which the evaluation study design was being conceptualized. The lead qualitative researcher and the WorkStyles manager were invited to attend the first class meeting and "pitch" their project to the students. In doing so, they were able to recruit three additional students to participate in the intensive observation of WorkStyles training sessions, to construct field notes, and to use their resulting knowledge to help refine the refugee focus group study design. These students received university credit for their participation in the study. In this way, the capacities of the research team were significantly expanded.

Thus, a mixed methods design was collaboratively created, in an effort to satisfy the requirements of the funder, the lead community partner, and university partner. Missing from the table at this stage of the collaboration, unfortunately, were actual members of the refugee community; however, at the time the research team felt that their interests were being adequately represented by the WorkStyles manager. Moving forward, the collaborative study design constantly underwent changes due to unexpected study scenarios, such as missing data in the state's database and, as we will see later, the failure of participants to show up to interviews and focus group sessions. In other words, as the university researchers and lead community partner immersed themselves in the collection of data, the research design evolved and emerged as dictated by circumstances. The emergent nature of research design is frequently a reality of CBR (Strand et al., 2003).

Data Collection and Analyses

Both the quantitative and qualitative lead researchers, in close and constant collaboration with the lead community partner, moved forward separately, but simultaneously, to collect the necessary data. For the quantitative matched-control group study, WorkStyles staff (including refugees who were former WorkStyles participants) diligently compiled descriptive data (e.g., alien number, name, country of origin, date of arrival, gender) month by month for each of the three WorkStyles classes studied and, working with VOLAG staff, for a control group of non-WorkStyles participants (matched on factors such as level of English language proficiency and date of U.S. arrival). Detailed employment data for each of the study participants were obtained from a CRSP program analyst. (In the process of this data collection, suspicions about the incomplete nature of data regularly collected by CRSP through the VOLAGS were confirmed; thus, the study affirmed that recent improvements in the transfer of employment and resettlement data between the VOLAGs and CRSP were needed to ensure the integrity of the state employment data.) All the necessary data were

sent to the lead quantitative doctoral student for analysis. Because these data were collected in an ongoing fashion, frequent communication via email and face-to-face meetings occurred between the WorkStyles staff (including its refugee community members) and the doctoral student.

For the qualitative part of the study, four types of in-depth, qualitative data were ultimately collected: first, 20 hours of observation of two WorkStyles program sessions, performed by CBR graduate students; second, interviews of VOLAG representatives; third, focus groups of WorkStyles and non-WorkStyles refugees; and fourth, a focus group of WorkStyles trainers (including three trainers who are refugee community members). In most CBR studies, unplanned events can occur (Strand et al., 2003) and this study was no exception. In this project, one unforeseen occurrence was the observation team's strong recommendation to change the make up of focus groups, based upon what it had observed. The initial design (see note 2) had contemplated conducting only two focus groups. The observation team objected to this design, believing that the only way refugees would speak candidly about their training, job search, and employment experiences would be if four separate focus groups were constituted: employed WorkStyles graduates, unemployed WorkStyles graduates, employed non-WorkStyles graduates, and unemployed non-WorkStyles graduates. Responding to the observation team's objections, the lead doctoral student and the WorkStyles manager revamped the focus group design, and the graduate student team, using its understanding from the observations and the themes derived from the field notes, constructed protocols for conducting the focus groups. Again, it should be noted that the actual refugee community members of the WorkStyles staff or the program clients did not participate in this study design decision—perhaps a missed opportunity for broadening the community collaboration.

Next, the rationale behind having qualitative comparison groups (to compare the impact of WorkStyles versus other comparable pre-employment programs) was challenged by the interview information gleaned from the VOLAG representatives. The VOLAGs made it known that there really were no comparable job preparation programs in the area, so they referred all refugees with the requisite language proficiency to WorkStyles. Thus, any hope that through focus groups the researchers would be able to make meaningful comparisons between the impacts of WorkStyles and other comparable programs was dashed.

The focus groups themselves also did not proceed according to the revised plan. In an effort to foster trust with the prospective participants, the refugee WorkStyles staff members identified and contacted refugees to participate in the focus groups. Despite those staff members' almost Herculean efforts, a number of the planned sessions had to be cancelled at the last minute due to the inability of participants to attend. A number of obstacles, which are not uncommon with the refugee population, but were not anticipated, came into play. These included: inflexible employment schedules, lack of transportation, lack of child care, and lack of appreciation for the U.S. cultural expectation that appointments made are appointments kept. (In subsequent research projects with the refugee community conducted by the first author, these barriers have been addressed). Ultimately, one very rich focus group of employed WorkStyles graduates, and two separate interviews with one employed non-WorkStyles refugee[4] and one unemployed non-WorkStyles refugee were conducted. Some would argue that basing conclusions on such a small sample size is incomplete research. This argument reflects the tension between conducting a methodologically sound study and overcoming the realities of conducting research with and for the community. In this particular case, we were limited in the amount of time and resources we could ask our community partner to devote to recruiting participants. Despite this limitation, the focus group and interviews were recorded, with the consent of the refugee participants, and transcribed. The lead qualitative researcher thematically analyzed the transcripts, triangulating results with those gleaned from the observation field notes.

A final focus group with five WorkStyles trainers (dubbed "trainers' talk" by the participants), three of whom were refugees themselves, was held to capture their experience with the WorkStyles process, as well as to member-check some preliminary interpretations (see below). That session was also recorded and transcribed, and the results triangulated with information emerging from the other qualitative data sources described above.

Clearly, the unanticipated problems with the sampling design required a flexible and creative response. Although the team's response may have detracted from the rigor of the research (a tension discussed in the introduction of this article), it ensured that data collection could be completed in a timely and quality manner, which is what was guaranteed to the funder.

Interpretation and Verification of Findings

From an interpretive standpoint, the quantitative results revealed that completing the WorkStyles program did not significantly affect the short-term employment outcomes of the participants, as compared with the matched-control group. However, the qualitative findings, reflecting the central themes that

emerged from the qualitative data, revealed that WorkStyles was likely contributing to the long-term employment success of its graduates, as well as to their overall well-being in their new world. Specifically, three themes (culture, capabilities, and confidence, described as "the three C's" in the final evaluation report) emerged. These themes reflect the fact that WorkStyles honors the cultures from which the refugees come, as well as teaches them about the new U.S. culture in which they now find themselves; that WorkStyles teaches practical capabilities upon which refugees can rely on when finding and keeping a job; and that WorkStyles instills confidence in refugees which is critical for them to succeed in their new lives.

Verification of these results and their interpretations occurred in two ways. First, the qualitative interpretation (especially the "three "Cs") was shared with the WorkStyles staff -- both refugee and non-refugee members -- at the end of the "trainers' talk" focus group. The lead community partner enthusiastically endorsed these themes, even to the point of incorporating them into presentation materials about WorkStyles to be used at a "Training the Trainer" seminar the following week. Second, the lead quantitative and qualitative doctoral students each created draft reports relating their findings, shared and edited each others' work, and the quantitative doctoral student merged the two into a single draft report. This merged draft was shared with WorkStyles staff, and the two lead researchers conducted two face-to-face meetings (and wrote many emails) to obtain and discuss the staff's feedback. Two of the refugee staff members provided valuable input based upon their own experiences and observations. The feedback was carefully regarded, and led to, in some cases, significant changes in the report's observations and recommendations. Thus, the experience and expertise of both the university and the lead community partner were amply reflected in the final report to the funder.

Dissemination of the Results

The results communicated to the funder were neither in substance, nor in form, what had originally been anticipated. The university partner had understood that a largely quantitative report would be produced for the funder, and the qualitative results would be more for the internal consumption and edification of the community partner. A combination of the inconclusiveness of the quantitative results and the extremely positive experience of working with a committed lead community partner (as well as witnessing and appreciating the exceptional nature of the WorkStyles program) led the lead quantitative doctoral student, in her role as project manager of the study, to make the decision to include the entire qualitative piece in the final report to the funder. Otherwise, she believed that the "whole picture" of WorkStyles' impacts could not have been communicated; she felt that "it would have done an injustice to the WorkStyles program" to have restricted the final report to the quantitative portion of the study. Interestingly, the incomplete nature of the picture of WorkStyles presented by the quantitative results had been anticipated by the community partner, which was one of the reasons why a mixed methods design was pursued in the first place. Ultimately, the final report was forwarded to the funder, and a face-to-face meeting was held to discuss the report with him and all the evaluation stakeholders.

Impact of the Project

As stated above, the quantitative results revealed that there were no statistical differences between the WorkStyles group and the control group in early employment outcomes. This answered the original question posed by the funder (CRSP). However, it was concluded that 90 days was not enough time to see the employment impacts of the WorkStyles program. Thus, a longer study time frame was needed.[5] The funder's initial reaction to the quantitative study results was that one of the WorkStyles grants was possibly inappropriate as a funding source because its intention was to support early employment programs. Discussion ensued regarding this point. The WorkStyles manager pointed out that WorkStyles' purpose was to assist refugees with retention and long-term success, and that as a pre-employment training program, WorkStyles had no control over refugees' job placement. That responsibility was already assigned to the VOLAGs.

However, after reviewing the results and conclusions of the qualitative part of the report, the funder was able to see that there were longer-term integration benefits. Integration is a topic that holds a high priority in nationwide refugee resettlement, and the report allowed CRSP to better promote and position WorkStyles within the range of beneficial services for refugees. The funder concluded that while the justification and outcome statements for the WorkStyles funding streams may need to be altered, there was a strong need for the program. The funder had recently (six months prior to the issuance of the report) identified an additional funding source more appropriate to WorkStyles' long-term benefits that actually allowed the program to increase the number of its offerings. At the time that this manuscript was being written, WorkStyles had begun offering classes twice per month instead of once. Therefore, as a result of presenting the long-term benefits of WorkStyles too, the overall funding for the program increased enough to allow for almost double the number of annual programs, which extends the reach

Table 1
Promising Practices in This CBPER Project by Project Domain

Project Domain	What Worked
University-Community Partnership	• Sustainable support systems • Collaboration and clear division of labor • Project team nurtured the university-community relationship
Evaluation Activities	• All partners involved in every phase of the evaluation • Realistic goals and project expectations set • Qualitative and quantitative reports combined into a more comprehensive final report • Findings verified with program staff members before dissemination of a more formal report • Final meeting convened with stakeholders to discuss the evaluation findings and their use
Project Outcomes/Impact	• Findings were used by the funder and community partner • All partners benefited from the project

of the program in meeting the pre-employment needs of many more refugees.

Promising Practices in This CBPER Project

Every research or evaluation project undertaken in collaboration with community representatives involves different parameters (e.g., varied goals; differing levels of involvement, expertise, and commitment from the various stakeholders; and a wide range of financial resources). As such, there is no single recipe for success for such a project. However, the collaboration among the different stakeholders in this case study resulted in several ingredients which other practitioners may find helpful when planning and conducting their own projects in the community. These are listed in Table 1. They are organized into three project domains: university-community partnership, evaluation activities, and project outcomes/impacts.

University-Community Partnership

The university-community partnerships was one of the stronger aspects of this project, despite the fact that the current refugee program participants were not represented among the partners (a shortcoming discussed later). There were many reasons that the university-community partnership worked: sustainable support systems between and among the partners; a sense of collaboration between the partners, but also a clear division of labor for participants on the project team; and the university-community relationship was nurtured.

Sustainable support systems. Due to the relationship of trust that had been built between the partners, every member of the research team felt he or she had the support of the other members. This was especially true for the doctoral students and the WorkStyles manager, who received social support from each other, as well as academic and work-related support from the university professor and the director of refugee services. Equally important was the trusting relationship between the refugees and the project team, facilitated by active participation in the data gathering process by WorkStyles staff members who themselves were refugees. The refugees provided the information without which there would not have been a qualitative study, and such trust is hard to develop, and easy to shatter.

Additionally, what was unique in this particular project and which undoubtedly contributed to its general success, was the hierarchy of responsibilities assigned to graduate students on the project. The quantitatively-oriented doctoral student was approaching the end of her coursework when this evaluation study took place. As such, she was the project manager and oversaw the merging of the quantitative and qualitative portions of the study and was ultimately responsible for producing the final report. The qualitatively-oriented doctoral student was in the middle of her coursework when the project was underway. Thus, while she had a lower level of overall responsibility, her responsibilities were significant. She was in charge of overseeing the entire qualitative portion of the study, which included, among other things, training the first-year graduate students from the CBR class. These graduate students had the least responsibility, yet they still contributed to the project by taking field notes, helping write the focus group protocols and, in some cases, helping conduct the focus groups and interviews. This hierarchy was effective because it designated appropriate roles in the research/evaluation process to the graduate students based on their level of graduate school training. Despite this "built-in" hierarchy, the graduate students' voices were equally heard during all phases of the project, which is consistent with CBR principles.

Collaboration and clear division of labor. Collaboration, specifically the creation of equal partner-

ships, is one of the three guiding principles of CBR as well as CBPER which distinguishes them from traditional research (Reback et al., 2002; Strand et al., 2003). This project was driven by a partnership structure that recognized the strengths and expertise of WorkStyles staff and doctoral students. By his own admission, the WorkStyles manager had limited research knowledge; however, he brought first-hand knowledge and practical expertise gained through his relationship with the program, with the refugees that it served, and with staff members who were also themselves members of the refugee community. This afforded him the ability to understand the research needed to benefit WorkStyles. And while the doctoral students possessed technical expertise and skills in quantitative, qualitative, and mixed research design, data analysis, and knowledge dissemination, the project required them to move out of familiar social and professional networks to work with a new, diverse group of people and approaches to social change. Because each partner recognized each other's strengths and limitations and heard and valued their expertise, there was equal participation in the research process. A division of labor resulted with each person having one or more designated tasks with the expectations of each party specified clearly. As one of the doctoral students put it, "Everyone pulled their own weight; no one was a weak link. Everyone was excited. Everyone came to meetings with what they needed to come with… no one didn't show up or not do what they were supposed to do." Thus, the academics did not dominate; rather, reciprocity was demonstrated by the lead community partner having choice in the level of involvement in the project and being fully engaged in the creation and critique of the knowledge created.

Nurturing the university-community relationship. In this particular case, not much nurturing at the beginning of the relationship was necessary because as one of the lead graduate students put it, "We all really clicked; everyone's personality just jived from the very beginning." However, even relationships that are easy at the beginning may eventually take some effort. In this particular case, the lead community partner and the university partner were in constant contact via email. Additionally, each partner was physically present at the site of the other. For instance, all five of the doctoral students who worked on this project attended one of the closing ceremonies (the ceremony, described at the beginning of this article, that celebrates the completion of the WorkStyles program, as well as the culture from which each refugee participant comes). The WorkStyles manager recounts, "At one closing ceremony Kate [one of the graduate students from the CBR class] made a quilt and presented it to the students. She also brought in representations of her culture because it was Valentines Day so she brought in Valentines for all the students." Additionally, the WorkStyles manager attended an introduction to research class that the university professor taught, to talk about this particular project. These types of actions extended above and beyond the responsibilities/roles set forth in the project, and helped to nurture the relationship between the lead community partner and the university partner. The WorkStyles manager commented, "At the level that we were all involved, the relationships developed more solidly, more real; the interactions were so much more genuine."

Evaluation Activities

What worked best with regards to the evaluation itself were the "book end" activities—the planning and dissemination/utilization of the findings. Specifically, the funder, WorkStyles manager, and university researchers were all involved in the planning process; the goal/expectation for the project was reasonable; the findings were verified with program staff members before dissemination of a more formal report; and a meeting with all of the involved stakeholders was held to discuss the evaluation findings and how they would be used.

All recognized partners were involved in planning process. The funder, the WorkStyles manager, and the university representatives were all involved in the planning process. The identification of the research question—"Is WorkStyles having a short-term impact on the employment outcomes of its graduates?"—came from the funder, but because the WorkStyles manager was also involved in the planning, he was able to voice what he and his fellow program staff members hoped to learn from this CBPER project. As such, a multiple-outcome, mixed-methods project was designed to meet the needs of the funder and lead community partner.

Realistic goals and clear expectations. Despite the fact that this project had multiple outcomes, the project had a realistic goal and clear expectations. Because CBR projects strive for social change, students and faculty members might have lofty, ambitious goals related to ameliorating the social ills of our society. To compound the problem, projects involving university partners often have timelines defined by the length of time of a university quarter or semester, making accomplishing such elevated goals virtually impossible. This project had a narrowly defined, straightforward goal: to answer the question put forth by the funder. In this sense, our project was an example of a small-scale effort at social change (Maguire, 1993).

Combined quantitative and qualitative findings in final report. On the back end of the project, a decision was made to combine the qualitative and quantitative reports to create a more comprehensive report. Combining the findings gave a much more complete

and accurate picture of the WorkStyles program. Additionally, the qualitative findings helped explain the statistically non-significant quantitative findings, as well as generated new research ideas about just how the WorkStyles program is benefiting its clients (by impacting longer-term integration factors).

Verified findings with program staff members. The university researchers scheduled two meetings with the WorkStyles program staff to share the early drafts of the report before the dissemination of the formal report. This allowed them to check the findings for accuracy, make sure that the recommendations made were feasible, and incorporate any final information gleaned about the program, ultimately, leading to a more useful final report.

Meeting to discuss evaluation findings and their utilization. Finally, a meeting was held with all stakeholders (minus the current refugee clients) to discuss the evaluation findings and how they might be utilized by the funder and program staff. This was definitely one factor that allowed this project ultimately to have a successful impact.

Project Outcomes/Impact

Two project outcomes/impacts were viewed as successful: the findings were jointly utilized by the funder and community partner, and all of the partners benefited in some way from this CBPER project.

Findings utilized by the funder and community partner. The fact that the university researchers worked with WorkStyles staff to refine the final report and that a meeting was held with all invested stakeholders to discuss the findings and the utilization of the results undoubtedly prevented the report from being put on a bookshelf to collect dust; rather the findings were utilized by both of the community partners (WorkStyles and CRSP). This is the goal of every participatory, utilization-focused evaluation and it moves the researcher one step closer to impacting social change—one goal of conducting research in collaboration with the community.

All partners benefited from the project. All stakeholders—the funder, the community partner, and the university partner—were truly invested in this project. This personal investment helped ensure this project's success because each member remained motivated to see the project through to completion. Additionally, the project resulted in several benefits for all involved. The students experienced self-development and personal growth as they listened to and learned from the community partner, applied their research skills collaboratively in a community setting, and saw their contributions valued. The WorkStyles manager and refugee staff were satisfied with the process because their expertise and participation were valued during all or most phases of the project; consequently the final report addressed issues of immediate importance to the organization and provided understandable and useful information in a timely fashion (Kelley, 1995). CRSP benefited, not only by being able to better understand flaws in the employment data collection process, but also by gaining a more accurate view of the impact of WorkStyles, which challenged past assumptions and provided a new framework in which to position WorkStyles to better align with emerging integration dialogues. The refugee community itself benefited in a very concrete way: as a result of the presentation to the funder of the longer-term benefits of WorkStyles, an increase in funding was obtained that now permits approximately twice as many refugees to benefit from the program.

Shortcomings of This CBPER Project

This CBPER study process, while valuable for its participants in many respects, did, indeed, have some shortcomings. Table 2 breaks down the aspects of the

Table 2
Shortcomings of This CBPER Project by Project Domain

Project Domain	What Did Not Work
Project Logistics	• A restricted timeframe (due to the funder's fiscal year end) • Limited financial resources
University-Community Partnership	• The partnership excluded current program "clients" (refugees) (sometimes called CBR "in the middle" (Strand et al., 2003)
Evaluation Activities	• Current program "clients" (refugees) were not included in the evaluation • Insufficient focus on program theory during the planning • Process-oriented or long-term outcome data were not collected • Team failed to anticipate barriers refugees would have to participate in the study • The quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis efforts were conducted independently of each other • Findings from the qualitative portion were based on a small number of interviews conducted

CBPER project that did not work into the following project domains: project logistics, university-community partnerships, and evaluation activities.

These project limitations are inter-related. For example, the methodological limitations—e.g., the unduly short-term focus of the quantitative study, failure to collect process data, failure to focus on program theory in the planning stage, and the less-than-optimum participation level by refugees in the qualitative study—can be attributed in part to external causes (limitations of time and funding, listed as project logistic shortcomings) and to internal issues (graduate student inexperience). From a CBR process vantage point, however, one central limitation looms large: the partners did not ensure that actual refugee program clients participated in the collaborative framing of the research question and the formulation of the study design. In hindsight, such participation could easily have been procured. Refugee staff members at WorkStyles did engage in the process at the data collection/analysis and verification of findings phases, and they could have been brought in at the project's outset as well. Perhaps if they had, certain subsequent difficulties encountered in the study—for example, the narrow scope of the initial research question (about which the WorkStyles manager expressed doubts from the start) and the barriers to refugee participation in the focus groups—might have been anticipated and articulated early on, and adjustments might have been made.

Lessons Learned

(1) *A participatory evaluation* is a useful CBR vehicle through which a community service provider may learn if its program is effectively meeting the needs of its clients and/or achieving the program's goals.

(2) The choice of community partner influences the success of the project. To increase the chances that a community-university partnership will yield fruitful outcomes that benefit both partners, a community partner must have the capacity to be an equal partner with students and university professors in the research process.

(3) Graduate students selected for participation in CBR/CBPER projects should possess complementary skills (e.g., quantitative and qualitative expertise) and graduate training levels (e.g., first-year, third-year, and fifth-year of graduate training).

(4) The program's theoretical model should be considered before embarking on the evaluation. This will ensure that the data collected is relevant and worthwhile.

(5) Information gained from the evaluation can be maximized by collecting both process and outcomes data.

(6) Use of a mixed-methods design (quantitative and qualitative methods) can also maximize the information gained from a project.

(7) Early and active participation by all partners (including program clients) in all phases of the study is important and is likely to yield a more robust and meaningful overall process.

(8) Every partner should be encouraged to state their goals/expectations for the project in the beginning, especially if a third-party funder is involved.

(9) Care should be taken to ensure that the project is mutually beneficial to all parties.

(10) A meeting should be convened at the end of the project to discuss the research/evaluation findings and how they might be utilized by the community partner(s).

Conclusion

Nationally, academics (both administrators and professors) are changing the engagement missions of their institutions in ways that embrace teaching, research, and outreach. Simultaneously, with dwindling public spending on social programs, agencies like WorkStyles are being asked to do more with fewer resources. CBR is continuing to emerge as a popular research paradigm, and the processes and outcomes of the project described in this article underline its potential to respond to the changing environments facing higher education and community organizations. As a set of research methods and underlying beliefs about the ways in which research ought to be conducted, CBR can increase the capacity of students and community partners and they can be more empowered to make institutional, personal, and social change.

Furthermore, when case studies, such as this one, embrace the collective representation of participants, they allow for everyone's voice to be heard and provide a unique opportunity to gain more comprehensive insight into the progression of a generally successful project. The detailed documentation and dissemination of the steps taken in this project advances the theoretical and methodological understanding in the field and informs better CBR practice, including the use of *participatory evaluations*, in situations that require the evaluation of a community program/organization. Presently, there is a dearth of research focusing on conditions for successful and unsuccessful CBR work, and thus, the field could benefit from

more accounts describing what works and what does not work in CBR projects. Finally, it is important to note that this article was coauthored by all of the collaborators in this project. When university and community practitioners collaborate both on the implementation and dissemination of CBR projects, their efforts may serve to enhance the credibility of CBR and demonstrate its effectiveness to university students and faculty, community members, government and private funders, professional associations, and the public at large.

Notes

[1] Case studies are best suited for research that is exploratory in nature (Creswell, 1994). They seek to develop an in-depth understanding of complex processes like CBR projects, and provide inferences for successes and failures which can inform the field (Yin, 2003). Case study researchers study one or a few cases, collect multiple sources of data, and strive for detail and depth of analysis (Stoecker, 2005). In this study, we drew upon our observations of the project as it unfolded, and relied on all project data, research logs, WorkStyles documents, field notes, email correspondence, graduate students' journal entries, draft and final evaluation reports, as well as a formal focus group discussion involving the authors, which was taped and transcribed. Our analysis consisted of all authors reading through these sources to develop an overall understanding of the case, and holding a series of meetings to develop issues or themes about the case. The final step involved determining the extent to which these issues and themes connected with and added to the literature on CBR.

[2] The initial design contemplated two focus groups, to be divided along either the criterion of employment (one group comprised of employed WorkStyles graduates and employed alumni of other pre-employment training programs, and the second group composed of unemployed WorkStyles and non-WorkStyles refugees) or the criterion of pre-employment program (one group of both employed and unemployed WorkStyles refugees, and a second group of both employed and unemployed non-WorkStyles refugees). The attempt to limit the scope to two focus groups was based on funding constraints.

[3] The WorkStyles and VOLAG staff agreed on a simple language assessment system based on a standardized test used for placement in the WorkStyles program. A WorkStyles participant's score on the Basic English Skills Test © (BEST) was assigned a number from 1 to 3 (1 = beginning, 2 = intermediate, and 3 = advanced). The VOLAG Employment Specialists were given a list of WorkStyles participants with their language scores rated 1-3. They were then asked to identify refugees from their agency who did not attend WorkStyles, but who they felt had the same language rating. The assumption was made that based upon their experiences working with non-native English speakers, VOLAG staff would be able to rate their clients' English speaking ability on this scale, but without the aid of the BEST assessment tool. This assumption proved correct and, thus, along with gender language ability, was the third criterion for the matched group.

[4] The participant for this interview needed an interpreter, and one of the WorkStyles trainers stepped in to provide the necessary interpreting service.

[5] However, CRSP only collects employment data on refugees up to 90 days. Thus, other data collection efforts would need to be considered to achieve a longer study time frame.

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