CBPR and a Multitrack Model of Development: A proposed critical ethnography

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Abstract

The modernization paradigm of development still dominates in practice, according to Sparks (2007), and apparently, that is only one indicator of how the participatory development paradigm has not lived up to its elegant theoretical promise. This paper argues that the community-based participatory paradigm can live up to its promise as it works in tandem with the dominant paradigm, despite seemingly antithetical epistemologies. A critical ethnography of a community-based participatory research project in a Midwest university health communication class is proposed to assess this contention. Some research questions that could be addressed include: Do group members connect their experience to the CBPR approach studied during the health communication class to their own work while designing the health campaign? Is the annotated multitrack model useful in describing a CBPR classroom project? Ultimately, this paper seeks to add to the literature by making connections between health and development communication within pedagogical and community settings, with an eye toward better interventions and positive social change.

Keywords: community-based participatory research, development communication, health communication, participatory paradigm, critical ethnography
CBPR and a Multitrack Model of Development: A Proposed Critical Ethnography

The dominant paradigm, also known as the modernization paradigm, has been noted as one that does not universally further development (Frank, 1996; Melkote, 2002; Melkote & Steeves, 2014, In Press; Schramm, 1978; Sparks, 2007). Nevertheless, that paradigm still dominates in practice, according to Sparks, in part because alternative paradigms have not lived up to their theoretical promises. Following the lead of Mefalopulos (2008), this paper contends that the participatory paradigm can be successfully implemented in a development initiative, and that it can be used in conjunction with the dominant paradigm. A critical ethnography of a community-based participatory research project in a Midwest university health communication class is proposed to assess this argument in support of a multitrack model. Specifically, a communication Ph.D. student proposes participating in and studying a team of undergraduate communication students as they develop and launch a campus health communication campaign under the guidance of a health communication scientist and professor. The strengths and weaknesses of development paradigms will be explored in this essay, as will their theoretical underpinnings, and models of application. A brief investigation into the ethnographic methodology will also be undertaken as one is proposed to ascertain the viability of using a multitrack model in praxis. Ultimately, this paper seeks to add to the literature by making connections between health and development communication within pedagogical and community settings.
Review of Literature

Sparks (2007) argues that health communication has long been an important component of development communication. He also argues that it has often been a dimension most likely to adhere to the dominant paradigm. This essay does not dispute that contention. Instead, it posits an example of how the dominant paradigm can be effectively employed in combination with the alternative, participatory paradigm. Like Mefalopulos (2008), this essay argues despite – or perhaps because of - the epistemological and methodological differences of the paradigms, neither is universally useless or useful in all situations. Both may be applicable within one development initiative, but it is critical to understand the most logical point at which to draw upon one paradigm or the other. To that end, a review of the paradigms follows.

Combining Dominant and Participatory Paradigms: The Multitrack Model

Schramm (1978) recognizes that the old paradigm, also known as the modernization or dominant paradigm, has been rightly criticized for many reasons: it was tied to growth, particularly economic growth, which led to a traditionalism/modernity dualism (Melkote & Steeves, 2014f, In press) that supposed the superiority of urbanization, industrialization, modernization, and exogenous knowledge, over rural, traditional, and folk culture, as well as indigenous knowledge. This attention to growth also promoted the idea that change had to occur in a way that elitists, usually Western men, identified as progressive. Schramm notes that there was no room in the dominant paradigm for alternative ideas about what direction change could or should take, or that some people may prefer striving for development offering different outcomes than those prescribed by Western elites.
Advocates of the participatory paradigm suggest that the paradigm is a viable alternative to the one that dominated in development for decades. The idea that culture matters, that modernization is not always superior to traditionalism, that the two positions are not mutually exclusive, and that indigenous people who understand the culture and traditions of their community have a role to play in their own development, is the basis of the participatory approach to development. As described by Melkote and Steeves (2014a, In press), the approach is viewed as a blend of “endogenous and exogenous elements” (p. 4) of which local culture is a key component and a source of knowledge and wisdom. The paradigm has been referred to as “…‘another development,’ ‘empowerment,’ ‘participation,’ and ‘multiplicity paradigm’” (Mefalopulos, 2008, p. 7).

The two paradigms seem diametrically opposed. Mefalopulos (2008) agrees that the positions are very different noting that from an epistemological standpoint, the modernization paradigm posits that the researcher must be detached from and remain objective about what is being studied, while the participatory paradigm assumes that the researcher is not detached from the object of study and is an active participant in the investigation. At the methodological level, the dominant paradigm posits a quantitative approach, while the participatory model incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methods. Modes of communication are generally different, too, with the modernization paradigm usually adhering to a monologic, top-down dissemination of information, and the participatory paradigm positing a dialogic model of communication.

Mefalopulos (2008) argues that in practice, both approaches could be utilized in one campaign. In what he calls the multitrack model, communication is mostly dialogic throughout the model’s stages, but the model also incorporates monologic communication in later phases,
recognizing its efficacy in information dissemination important to development initiatives.

Melkote and Steeves (2014a, In press) elaborate on the model by offering the following figure for consideration:

Melkote and Steeves updated the model to allow for development approaches and methods not necessarily explicated by Mefalopulos when he first created the model. The model’s flexibility is one of its strengths and part of its design, although modifications cannot be made without understanding how the seemingly contradictory paradigms are meant to be used in combination in order to maintain theoretical consistency. Specifically, Mefalopulos notes:

The single arrow linking the research phase with the strategy design phase indicates the requirement of always using the dialogic mode at the beginning. From the second phase a number of different approaches in any (or a combination) of the two modes can be
applied based on the situation – hence the additional arrows. Monitoring and evaluation, while positioned as the last phase, should also be considered at the start to be effective – as indicated by the peripheral arrows at the top and bottom. (p. 73)

An exploration of approaches viable for each stage will be explicated in this essay with particular attention given to participatory approaches, underscoring the understanding that two-way, dialogic communication is considered the grounding force of the model’s effectiveness.

**First Stages: Participatory Approaches**

There are numerous participatory approaches and terms used to describe approaches that could inform the initial stages of the multitrack model. Mefalopulos (2008) advocates the use of communication research/communication-based assessment (CBA), while others have noted the usefulness of community-based research (CBR), and action research (AR) (“Differences,” n.d), as well as participatory action research (PAR) (Borda, 2006; Melkote & Steeves, 2014, In press; Troppe, 1994), participatory rural communication appraisal (PRCA) (Anyaeegbunam, Mefalopulos, & Moetsabi 2004; Melkote & Steeves, 2014, In Press), and community-based participatory research (“Differences,” n.d.; Hergenrather, Geishecker, McGuire-Kulet, Gitlin, & Rhodes, 2010; Ickes, 2011; Koster, Baccar, & Lemelin, 2012; Love, 2011; Peterson, Antony, & Thomas, 2012; Strand, 2003). The recurring theme for all approaches regardless of terms is active participation of people who might be the target of development, or residents of the community in which an initiative will likely be launched. Most scholars advocating for the participatory paradigm contend that *explorative* two-way communication is essential to successful, useful, and respectful development programs. Mefalopulos does not consider all participation equal and delineates participation types. He explains that *passive participation* is
the least effective because stakeholders are expected to sit quietly as they are informed about
development that they did not actively help create, while the desired *empowered participation* is
the most useful because local stakeholders have partnered with communication specialists to
create solutions to problems hindering development important to bettering stakeholders’ lives.

The multitrack model posits the use of CBA in the initial stages of the model, and
therefore, this paper proffers a brief explanation of that approach. The CBPR approach will then
be explored to argue that it maintains important elements of CBA useful in health and
development campaigns, while additionally offering elements of theory important to a classroom
setting (Hergenrather et al., 2010; Ickes, 2011; Koster et al., 2012; Love, 2011; Peterson et al.,
2012; Strand, 2003), two key factors in the proposed case study.

*Communication-Based Assessment (CBA).* Mefalopoulos (2008) posits that the main
purpose of a CBA is to “assess the political, social, cultural, and economic environment in which
a development initiative is situated, exploring the best options for change” (p. 28). He further
explicates that as a research approach, the CBA may include qualitative and quantitative methods
such as focus groups and surveys to inform the assessment. The opinions, knowledge, and
perceptions of stakeholders are actively sought out as they are invited to participate in and not
just inform the CBA.

Melkote and Steeves (2014a, In press) call CBA *the field research phase* in which
problems are posed and analyzed (p. 33). Involvement of community members who will likely
be targeted as part of the development initiative in these early stages is crucial, according to
Melkote and Steeves, in uncovering root causes to problems, as well as the risks and
opportunities of possible actions and solutions given community resources and needs.
Mefalopulos (2008) adds that work during the CBA should ultimately help answer the “why,” “what,” and “how much” questions about the situation under investigation with information deemed important by stakeholder actively involved in the process.

**Community-based participatory research (CBPR).** Similar to CBA, CBPR posits active participation by community members in addressing community needs (Hergenrather et al., 2010; Koster et al., 2012; Love, 2011; Mefalopulos, 2008; Melkote, 2002; Melkote & Steeves, 2001; Melkote & Steeves, 2014, In press; Peterson et al., 2012). At the basis of most descriptions of participatory research is that all who participate are equal partners. Unlike the dominant paradigm, an expert from outside the community is not immediately recognized as superior to others because he or she has more knowledge or authority than local stakeholders. Hergenrather et al. emphasize this point by explaining “CBPR emphasizes co-learning, reciprocal transfer of expertise, and sharing of decision-making power” among all of its members, which generally includes academics, business leaders, and community members who may be affected by the development program being discussed.

Ickes (2011) has linked CBPR to Paulo Freire’s ideas of empowerment and education. Known for his theories of liberation education explicated in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1993) posits that people are empowered when they are given the opportunity to understand the knowledge they possess. Ickes argues that CBPR can be seen as a means to that end, particularly in the health communication classroom. Her contention is an extension of one proffered by Wallerstein and Bernstein (1988) as they explored a “community and school-based prevention project for adolescents” within a Freirian framework (p. 379). As with many explorations of participatory approaches, Ickes offers a multi-phased model to follow in praxis, using Freire’s
definition of praxis: “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1993, p. 51). Borrowing from Rhodes and Benfield (2006), Hergenrather et al. (2010) also detail stages of CBPR in application that they contend are useful in guiding the entire development process, not just the first stages of a development initiative. Love (2010), too, points out that equitable member involvement is important in CBPR throughout all phases of development including identification of problems, formulating research questions, collecting and analyzing data, implementation of programs, and ongoing analysis. In an effort to inform praxis - and add to the literature connecting health and development communication in the classroom and in the community - a comparison of CBPR models and the multitrack model follows.

**Many Stages: Friere, CBPR and an Annotated Multitrack Model**

Ickes (2011) takes the acronym of *SHOWED* proffered by Wallerstein and Bernstein (1988) and places them in a three-stage model. The stages of Ickes’ Freirian model ultimately address the questions that *SHOWED* addresses:

- What do we “SEE” here? What is really “Happening”? [Stage one] How does the story relate to “OUR” lives? “WHY” have they become/done this (relate to specific behavior)?
- [Stage two] How is it possible for the individual to become “EMPOWERED”? What can we “DO” about it? [Stage three] (p. 20)

Similar to most participatory models, stage one in Ickes’ model emphasizes community participation and information gathering. Stage two and three also contain elements found in the later stages of other models, namely: discussing and addressing problems once defined, and devising an action plan to affect positive change.
As part of their investigation into the efficacy of a community-based health program focusing on persons living with HIV/AIDS, Hergenrather et al. (2010) presented a CBPR model that seems linear but as with the earlier proposed multitrack model, the authors explain that phases of this model often overlap or recycle when used in a community project:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application of CBPR to the Research Process</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Identify research questions</td>
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<td>2. Assess community strengths, assets, and challenges</td>
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<td>3. Define priorities</td>
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<td>4. Develop research and data collection and methodologies</td>
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<td>5. Collect and analyze data</td>
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<td>6. Interpret findings</td>
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<td>7. Disseminate findings</td>
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<td>8. Apply findings to address action</td>
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*Source: Rhodes & Benfield, 2005.*

A pattern emerges when most models of participation are delineated for purposes of application. It is generally understood that throughout the process, stakeholders will dialogue as they deem necessary. In the initial stages, information is gathered about a problem or need, and then in following stages that information is used to create objectives and possible solutions with the ultimate goal of disseminating information and putting into action a plan that will help the community of which the stakeholders are a part. Some models offer more practical advice than others, some explicate theory better than others, and some seem more relevant to research than others. All have at their core, however, active stakeholder participation and respectful dialogue to aid that participation.

This paper argues that the multitrack model as updated by Melkote and Steeves (2014, In press) not only includes model similarities previously discussed, it is also the most comprehensive in accounting for information dissemination, and monitoring and evaluation critical to better campaign development. With that in mind, the model has been annotated to
make clear the inclusion of theoretical and research tenets of CBPR. By conflating models that include similar themes but come from slightly different areas of communication – development, health, and pedagogy - this annotated model strives to guide communication focused on positive and directed social change.

**Annotated and Adapted Multitrack Model**

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*Source: Author, 2014.*

Many scholars posit that identifying a framework useful in practice, and incorporating theory and indigenous knowledge is important to successful health and development interventions (Hergenrather et al., 2010; Koster et al., 2012; Love, 2011; Mefalopulos, 2008; Melkote &
Steeves, 2014, In press; Peterson et al., 2012). This paper proposes using the above annotated and adapted multitrack model to inform a critical ethnography of the development of a health campaign by and for college students to assess that contention.

**Methods**

Critical ethnography is useful in this analysis because like participatory research, it actively incorporates and respects voices beyond the scientist’s (Madison, 2005). Recognizing the need for participation by people not necessarily considered experts in a given field of study, Vandenberg, and Hall (2011) argue that throughout the research process, the critical ethnographer must be reflexive and work to build relationships based on reciprocity to counter biases and avoid reinforcing the status quo. Madison (2005) agrees as she writes of the dialogic, participatory process that the researcher engages in with community members being studied. Participation is also understood when she acknowledges “the ‘performance’ of critical theory” arguing that critical ethnography is “critical theory in action” (p. 15). Madison ties key elements to pedagogy and development communication by adding that the critical ethnographer:

… will use the resources, skills, and privileges available to her to make accessible … the voices and experiences of subjects whose stories are otherwise restrained and out of reach. This means the critical ethnographer contributes to emancipatory knowledge and discourses of social justice. (p. 5)

There is support in the literature, then, for the use of critical ethnography when studying many topics of research, including the areas of health and development communication. This qualitative approach is additionally offered in counter argument to the idea that health communication, as an area of development communication, has been especially quantitative and
top-down in nature, and that more enlightened development work should include more dialogic communication elements commonly associated with the participatory paradigm.

To that end, this author, a communication Ph.D. student, proposes participating in and studying via critical ethnography informed by the annotated multitrack development model, a group of undergraduate communication students as they develop and launch a campus health communication campaign under the guidance of a health communication scientist and professor. The theoretical underpinnings of community-based participatory research informed the professor’s course design as she allowed four graduate students to oversee four small groups of undergraduates studying health communication at a mid-sized Midwestern college. Students and undergraduates were grouped according to similar weekly schedules to allow more easily for meetings outside of class if necessary. Based on survey results indicating several topics worthy of study on the college’s campus (ACHA, 2012), the professor narrowed campaign foci to sexual health and sleep, asking that two of the four groups focus on specific areas within sexual health, and two groups focus on specific areas dealing with sleep behaviors. Groups identified their favorite topics and via class discussion two groups finally identified as concentrating on sexual health and the other two groups on sleep. This author oversaw a group investigating sexual health. Over the course of sixteen weeks, the groups studied health communication theory, campaign development, and the influence of mass communication on health while attending group meetings to design and launch theory-based campaigns on their own campus. During that time, this author received permission from members to write a paper about the group experience. This paper proposes a review of notes, emails, and texts kept and created during the classroom and group meetings to inform this author’s ethnographic study and analysis of her experience.
Some research questions that could be addressed include: Did group members connect their experience to the CBPR approach studied during class with their own work while designing the health campaign? Is the annotated multitrack model useful in describing a CBPR classroom project? Does the annotated multitrack model add to our understanding of communication by making connections between health and development communication within a classroom setting? Does the annotated multitrack model add to our understanding of communication between community members designing campaigns seeking to influence positive change in their own community? Other research questions and observations will evolve as notes are reviewed and experiences are analyzed but as Madison (2005) argues, the critical ethnographer must begin with at least one question or the research will be less focused and uncertain.

**Discussion, Limitations, and Conclusion**

Many scholars have called for development paradigms that promote more than economic growth, and instead look at community-based participatory approaches (Hergenrather et al., 2010; Koster et al., 2012; Love, 2011; Mefalopulos, 2008; Melkote, 2002; Melkote & Steeves, 2001; Melkote & Steeves, 2014, In press; Peterson et al., 2012). The old, dominant paradigm of development and modernization simply has not worked for all situations or all places, all of the time (Frank, 1996; Melkote, 2002; Melkote & Steeves, 2014, In Press; Schramm, 1978; Sparks, 2007). Those failures should be given great consideration by future researchers, particularly those interested in the pursuit of better development initiatives offering better outcomes for the people the initiatives are meant to help. It is up to today’s development professionals to propose paradigms and methods that involve the people of the culture targeted for development in designing better futures for themselves. There is the risk that in proposing or promoting one
model or method over another confuses rather than enlightens the critical discussion surrounding 
social change, but the concept also supports the involvement of multiple voices, which has 
already been recognized as crucial to progressive community development. With that in mind 
this paper argues that the CBPR approach as part of a multitrack model is viable in future 
development projects given the greater presence of stakeholder investment, as well as its 
collective, rather than individualistic foundation. It can be used to advance the goals of 
empowerment education as well as development that seeks to empower individuals to lead better 
lives, in ways that they have defined as better. A critical ethnography addressing questions of 
participation, community, pedagogy, and the application of models in health and development 
campaigns should help lead to a better understanding of how active stakeholder involvement 
might result in positive and directed social change.
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