~~WHAT'S WRONG HERE?~~
WHAT'S RIGHT HERE?
Introducing the positive deviance approach to community-based work

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This article introduces positive deviance (PD) to the field of professional communication. Traditionally, in problem-solving situations we examine barriers to be overcome or import best practices from other contexts. PD instead meets people where they are. An asset-based, participatory approach, it values and amplifies what people are doing right without outside help. PD responds to calls for community-based work that is inquiry-driven, participatory, reciprocal, sustainable, critical, reflexive and therefore, more socially just. Through data from an instrumental case study on the reintegration of child soldiers in Northern Uganda, this article illustrates PD's process of rhetorical, intercultural inquiry. The article shows how flipping the deficit-based paradigm through PD creates new narratives and offers an alternative research framework or interventional methodology for professional communicators. The article ends with a discussion of the implications and limitations of PD in the contexts of ethics, social justice, and pedagogy.

Keywords. Community-based work, Participatory design, Asset-based, sustainability, Local knowledge, Social justice, Critical, reflexive, intercultural, rhetorical inquiry.

It takes eight hours to get from Kampala to the district of Pader in Northern Uganda. As our small 4X4 vehicle traversed the red dirt moguls, A.P., the local Save the Children in Uganda (SCiU) PD lead coordinator, briefed us on the setting, the history of the civil conflict, and the positive deviance (PD) project. Upon reaching the first internally displaced persons' (IDP) camp where we would conduct a participatory impact assessment, we were greeted by a large group of

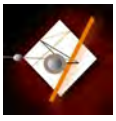

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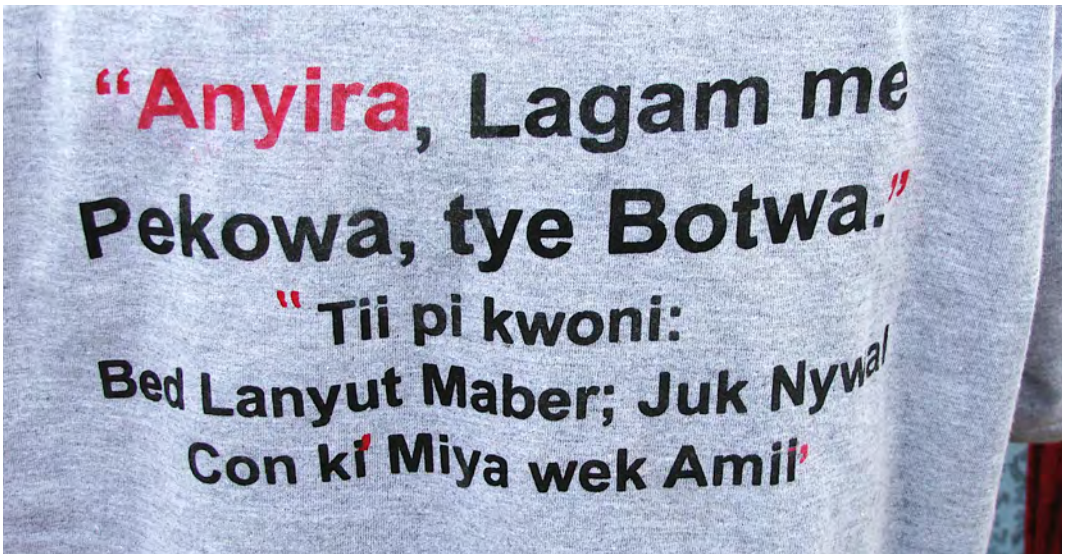
Figure 1.

T-shirts designed by "PD girls" for public awareness about being a role model and averting "transactional sex"



girls singing a joyous welcome song. They wore heather gray t-shirts with a message on the back: "Girls, the answers to our problems are within us./Work for your life: Be a role model; stop early pregnancy, and no give and take (transactional sex)." This was our first encounter with the "PD girls."

In spite of surviving the hardships of abduction, serving as soldiers, porters, and sex slaves, and being treated as pariahs by members of their communities, PD girls deviated from the norm in a positive way. They averted isolation, violence, and transactional sex—sex in exchange for goods, places to sleep, or food. Instead, they practiced *simple* and *uncommon* behaviors that made a big difference in their successful reintegration. What were they doing differently?

> PD girls work harder and smarter by practicing a variety of behaviors. Jane, one of the PD girls, [explained], 'After finishing work in my garden, I work in other community members' fields to earn extra money.' . . . Grace, a mentor noted, 'When they go fetch firewood some girls bring back an extra load. One they use

> for cooking, the other they sell for use the next day. One girl makes extra money by filling up an additional jerry-can of water at the hand pump, strapping it behind her bicycle and delivering it to a construction site.' (Singhal & Dura, 2009a, p. 48)

PD girls also worked collaboratively to get more work done; alternating shifts with others allowed them to go to school, care for their children, and to socialize (Singhal & Dura, 2009a, p. 49).

This article introduces PD as a socially just framework for community-based work in professional communication. Traditional problem-solving and research identify barriers and import best practices from other contexts. PD takes a decidedly different approach. It focuses on what *is* working—*what people are doing right* without outside help. PD is a rhetorical framework used to facilitate inquiry and amplify asset-based narratives. In the sections that follow, I first describe the theoretical and conceptual perspectives that inform this research. I explain my methodology for an instrumental case study on the reintegration of child soldiers in Northern Uganda. Through this case study I describe the process of rhetorical, intercultural inquiry by which PD facilitates transformational research: (a) the discovery of statistical outliers who, based on the odds against them, are not supposed to be surviving or thriving; (b) their uncommon but replicable behaviors and practices; and (c) the design of an initiative or intervention based on local research findings. I then discuss how flipping the deficit-based paradigm through PD creates new possibilities for professional communicators, and I examine them in terms of implications and limitations in the contexts of ethics, social justice, and pedagogy.

A Need for Greater Emphasis on Social Justice in Professional Communication

The term "community-based work" characterizes a variety of partnerships. Community-based work can occur in industry, government, and the nonprofit sector. It can be work with a research focus or with an action focus (e.g., action

research, participatory action research, service learning, instruction, consulting). It can be local or global. And it can be performed "in," "on," "for," "about," or "with" communities, which implies different logistical arrangements and ideological assumptions (Deans, 2000; Flower, 2008; Grabill, 2012). In their exploration of the role of researchers in professional communication action research, Blythe, Grabill, and Riley (2008) explained that the nuances in what we have come to know as action research[1] can be distinguished through "two hallmarks: (a) the researchers' commitment to social justice and (b) the relationship between researchers and participants" (p. 274). More recently, in the introduction to *The public work of rhetoric*, Ackerman and Coogan (2010) reiterated the call for more just, democratic, and ethical frameworks to do public work: "to do rhetoric 'out there' requires a shedding of academic adornments, a different professional disposition, new participatory and analytic tools, and a more grounded conception of public need" (p. 1). Similarly, Savage and Agboka, editors for this special issue, reiterated calls for more socially conscious and just approaches to professional communication, especially in international contexts (Savage & Mattson, 2011; Yu & Savage, 2013; Agboka, 2013a and 2013b; Dura, Singhal, & Elias, 2013). In essence, what these scholars call for are "methodological revisions" (Grabill, 2012) that view (1) research as a transformational tool—not just as a means to write "on" or "about" communities; (2) participation, reciprocity, and sustainability as ethical ideals; and (3) our roles as professional communicators as imbricated in political, ethical, economic, and ideological networks where power dynamics tend to favor certain groups and marginalize others.

For over 20 years professional communication scholars with interests in literacy studies, intercultural rhetoric, participatory design, risk communication, and critical methodologies, have advocated consistently and increasingly for approaches and models to community-based work that:

1. Are inquiry-driven—even when action-focused;
2. Value local knowledge and meaningful relationships;
3. Can be sustained beyond a study or intervention; and
4. Are reflexive and critical.

We see this in Lather's (1991) democratized process of inquiry; Cushman's (1996) agent of social change and (1998) activist ethnography; Sullivan and Porter's (1997) critical research practices; Grabill's (2001) community-based literacy and (2012) stance; Powell & Takayoshi's (2003) ethic of reciprocity; Mathieu's (2005) tactical rhetoric; Simmons' (2007) participatory risk communication; Long's (2008) local publics; Flower's (2008) intercultural inquiry; Walton & DiRenzi's (2009) value-sensitive design; and Agboka's (2013a) participatory localization, among others.

In the subsections that follow, I unpack the attributes of inquiry, participation, sustainability, and critical awareness that have brought us closer to doing more socially just work as a field. They provide the theoretical foundation for my analysis and discussion of positive deviance as a socially just framework for rhetorical, intercultural inquiry and action.

Inquiry-Driven

To say that scholars who engage in community-based work value inquiry may seem obvious. However, whether a project is primarily research-focused or is primarily action-focused, inquiry does not look the same to all people. The nature and quality of inquiry varies based on ideological dispositions, the type of work being performed, and other factors that intersect in the complexity of extrainstitutional collaborations (Cushman, 1996 and 1998; Sullivan & Porter, 1997; Deans, 2000; Blythe, Grabill, & Riley, 2008; Flower, 2008; Grabill, 2001 and 2012). Furthermore, in some of our work, particularly in projects that are primarily service-oriented, we are so motivated by action and social change that we neglect inquiry all together: "[we] are prepared to act, when [we] really need to inquire" (Flower, 2008, p. 154). And we need to inquire because inquiry is transformational: it is an opportunity not only to help us understand the communities with which we are working more fully, but also to value their members' intellectual capacity and at the same time to contribute to building a research capacity.

Value Local Knowledge and Meaningful Partnerships

"Community members typically exist as *participants* in social projects, not as *partners* with expertise who must be respected as agents in their own right" (Flower, 2008, p. 28). Our roles as professional communicators doing community-based work are generally dependent on logistics, i.e., the goals of the project, the setting, and our relationship to the partner community or organization. But in addition to logistics, which may or may not be under our direct control, are our assumptions about local knowledge. Just as inquiry does not look the same to all people, neither does participation. We are not likely to invite participation if we do not believe in a community's ability or capacity to contribute. For some, studying and writing *about* a community can imply valuing that community's knowledge by bringing it to the fore. Or, helping a community to disseminate its knowledge by legitimizing its ideas, lending community members' status, and creating awareness around issues important to them can also imply valuing what they know. The problem with these positions is that they tend to privilege the researchers' point of view, lens, or expertise (Cushman, 1996, 1998, & 2002; Flower & Heath, 2000; Flower, 2002 & 2008; Grabill, 2001; and Mathieu, 2005; Simmons, 2007; Long, 2008) and in the worst case scenario can go so far as "otherizing" or "recolonizing" the same people they intend to help (Agboka, 2013). This is not to say that community knowledge should preclude expert knowledge, but to give equal weight to a community's agendas, assumptions, and interpretations, critical and reflexive scholars suggest models for engaging in participatory design as well as mutual inquiry and literate action (See for example Cushman 1996 and 1998; Grabill 2001 and 2012; Mathieu, 2005; Spinuzzi, 2005; Simmons, 2007; Flower & Heath, 2001; Flower, 2008; Long, 2008; Blythe, Grabill, & Riley, 2008; Walton & DiRenzi, 2009; Evia & Patriarca, 2011; Agboka, 2013).

As researchers we have much to gain from the work we do with community partners (Cushman, 1998). It is our responsibility, through "self-critical, conscious navigation" (Cushman, 1996, p. 16) to define and redefine our relationships with partners and to ask and assess whether they are getting

something satisfactory out of the interaction (Powell & Takayoshi, 2003). According to Cushman (1998), "researchers and participants empower each other when they: (1) enable each other to achieve goals, (2) facilitate each other's actions, and (3) lend to each other their respective social statuses" (p. 23). For this kind of reciprocity to be possible, researchers must invest in meaningful relationship-building. Grabill (2012) noted the difference between making research decisions through the filter of "our disciplines, our politics, or our methods," e.g., as a qualitative researcher doing ethnography versus through the filter of relationships, e.g., "if maintaining the relationship is a priority, then many decisions during a research process will be informed by this principle" (p. 217). Although we will necessarily employ both filters, which one we prioritize will affect the process and outcomes of a project.

Sustainable

Sustainability, for our purposes here, is the ability for a project's process and/or outcomes to continue beyond the study or intervention with little guidance or outside resources. Ultimately, a community should be able to carry out its work independently of outside experts (Cushman, 2002; Grabill, 2007; Blythe, Grabill, & Riley, 2008). Sustainability is one of the most challenging aspects of community-based work. This can be because a majority of projects depend on external funding and commitment from institutional/organizational leadership (Shediac-Rizkalla & Bone, 1998). But it can also be because sustainability is most achievable when other aspects of socially just work described above are present, i.e., when the community is invested in the process—participation and reciprocity—and when a project centers on inquiry that is guided by community concerns (Cushman, 2002; Grabill, 2007). The link between the quality of researcher-community relationships and the depth of community participation has been well documented, especially in fields heavily involved in international community development (See for example Altman, 1995; Shediac-Rizkalla & Bone, 1998; Ofuoku, 2011). Perhaps less obvious is why research or inquiry would be a key component to sustainability since its primary purpose is often academic.

Research may be a less visible component to sustainability than community involvement and relationships, but it can have a transformational effect as a "lever" for capacity-building (Grabill, 2007).

Reflexive and Critical

Our orientations toward research are as important as the methods we use. Critical approaches account for the local and the global—geographic, social, institutional; they foreground power relations, ethics, politics, economics, and other social, contextual factors (Sullivan & Porter, 2001; Simmons, 2007; Faber, 2007; Grabill, 2012; Agboka, 2013). In essence, critical rhetoric brings up "difference" (Flower, 2008) and is "committed to naming those differences that mark one as less powerful" (Grabill, 2001, p. 91). Grabill (2012) proposed through the concept of "stance" that community-based scholars reflect critically on whether inquiry is present, of what type, our role, and what we stand to gain or lose vis a vis the community's role and what community members stand to gain or lose. To be critical is to acknowledge that even when we create spaces for those who are normally silenced or marginalized, it does not mean they will be able to participate equally or truly gain access (Grabill, 2001; Mathieu, 2005; Simmons, 2007; Flower, 2008). It is our role as professional communicators to "help tease out who is affected, who is participating, and who is left out" (Simmons, 2007, p. 117). Understanding and articulating stance is complex; our aspirations may not always be logistically within reach, or we might carry different assumptions about knowledge and participant relationships from one project to another.

An Overview of Positive Deviance

While we have made great strides towards more socially just approaches in rhetoric and professional communication, it is difficult for any single approach to encompass all of the called for methodological revisions. PD combines the socially just attributes of different approaches into a single rhetorical framework. It offers a tested and concrete alternative research or intervention methodology centered

on asset-based inquiry and action. Further, PD presents an opportunity for professional communicators to contribute our accumulated disciplinary knowledge and techne in inquiry, communication, and critical reflexivity. To set up the case study and analysis of an iteration of PD in addressing reintegration in Northern Uganda, in this section, I give a brief overview of PD's history, process, and principles.

A quarter of a century ago, nutritionists from Tufts University, Zeitlin, Ghassemi, and Mansour, conducted a literature review of nutrition studies between 1967 and 1983 that focused on nutritional success, rather than malnutrition. They applied this research to their own work in Burma and found that studying the behaviors of healthy babies produced different results than studying the behaviors leading to malnutrition (Zeitlin, Ghassemi, & Mansour, 1990). PD pioneers Jerry and Monique Sternin operationalized this research lens as an interventional approach in Vietnam in the 1990s (See Singhal, Sternin, & Dura, 2009). Since then PD has been used as both a research framework and as interventional methodology. PD has been applied in more than 40 countries. In education it has been used to address girls' access, improve student achievement, reduce high school drop-out rates, absenteeism, and disruptive behavior; in healthcare it has been used to improve hand hygiene compliance, reconciliation of medications, and end-of-life quality of life; in public health it has been used in interventions focusing on HIV/AIDS, malaria, maternal and newborn care, mental health, public housing senior care, polio, reproductive health, female genital mutilation, smoking prevention and cessation; and in other, various sectors it has been used for child protection, public extortion, agricultural development, and corporate sales (See www.positivedeviance.org for published work on PD in these sectors).

PD is an asset-based approach to social change. At its core is the focus on statistical outliers. Instead of looking for what is not working or what is causing a problem, PD asks, what *is* working? And what is working when it *shouldn't* be working? For instance, in the Vietnam cornerstone case, traditional problem-solving would have had us look for malnourished children. If we were to plot them on a map, we would plot them as red dots. And perhaps we would analyze

their "red dot" behaviors and relationships or patterns between the dots. Instead, the PD team in Vietnam, comprising PD facilitators and community members, mapped the *green* dots: those thriving against all odds. And they analyzed their behaviors based on (1) accessibility/adoptability by others as well as (2) how uncommon they are for the local culture. Only those behaviors that were immediately actionable by anyone in the community were selected. This part of the PD process is known as the PD Inquiry. PD is generally carried out in two phases: the PD Inquiry and the PD Intervention. The PD Inquiry phase is the research or data-gathering phase, while the PD Intervention is the action or implementation phase. The two phases are explained in Table 1 below and then again in greater detail in the Uganda case study.

During the PD Inquiry phase, the PD team in Vietnam found that caregivers of nourished children were feeding them six instead of three times a day; they were adding tiny shrimp they found in the rice paddies to porridges; and they were feeding children deliberately, face to face—as opposed to carrying them on their backs or multitasking. During the PD Intervention phase, caregivers of nourished and undernourished children alike, were invited to host cooking sessions where participants could "act their way" into the PD behaviors by bringing PD foods and demonstrating/practicing cooking and feeding techniques. This action-based interventional design was a radical departure from the more prevalent communication artifacts such as leaflets or posters publicizing effective nutritional behaviors. It was so effective that malnutrition decreased by 85 percent and the project was replicated with more than 50,000 children and their families nationwide (Singhal, Sternin, & Dura, 2009). The Vietnam case showed that beyond its applicability as a research framework, when PD was participatory—the more participatory the better—and followed by an intervention—the more action-based the better—it had a greater chance of sustainability and spread. Thus, in addition to inquiry, participation and action became two ideals for PD worldwide.

Table 1.

How PD Works: The "6 Ds" of PD and Guiding Principles

	6 "Ds" of PD	Process	Principles
PD Inquiry	1. Define the Problem	- Establish a baseline: find existing statistics about a local problem and codefine the problem with the community	- Go slow to go fast: invest in relationship-building - Nothing about me without me: who else should be a part of this conversation?
	2. Determine Existence of Statistical Outliers	- Asset-mapping and community-based focus groups determine the existence of PD individuals or groups	- 180 degree flip: the PD question, what is working when it shouldn't be working?
	3. Discover Uncommon but Replicable Behaviors and Practices	- Conduct interviews and observations to identify PD behaviors	- What are PDs *doing* differently that is *replicable* and *uncommon*?
PD Intervention	4. Design Intervention	- Amplify and operationalize PD behaviors for adoption by larger community	- It is easier to act your way into a new way of thinking than to think your way into a new way of acting
	5. Discern and 6. Disseminate	- Implement ongoing monitoring and evaluation -Replication of process for other problems or in other communities	- Look for cultural beacons: culturally embedded, locally relevant measures and markers of change (See Dura, Felt, & Singhal, 2014)

Research Questions

Professional communicators are poised to adopt and adapt PD and to make contributions on interdisciplinary PD teams. The instrumental case study and my analysis of it in subsequent sections aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How does PD enable transformational research and in doing so respond to calls for socially just approaches to community-based work in professional communication?
2. What unique contributions might professional communicators make in interdisciplinary PD projects?

Instrumental Case Study

To answer the research questions above I have constructed an instrumental case study of PD as it was used to address the reintegration of child soldiers in Northern Uganda. With an instrumental case study, "the case is of secondary interest; it plays a supportive role, facilitating our understanding of something else. The case is often looked at in depth, its contexts scrutinized, its ordinary activities detailed, but because this helps us pursue the external interest" (Stake, 2005, p. 227). To construct this case I have drawn on published research, unpublished research for my dissertation, observational notes, and archival materials used with permission from Save the Children.[2] I have used the theoretical perspectives presented in the introduction to inform my analysis through which I critically assess PD's rhetorical attributes, potential for socially just community-based work, and its implications and limitations.

PD to Address the Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Northern Uganda

Background

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) was formed in Northern Uganda in 1987 by rebel priestess Alice Lakwena as a religious military group that would undertake

civil purification through violence. A man in his mid 20s at the time, Joseph Kony, ran a parallel rebel movement that took Lakwena's beliefs and values to a more horrific level. Under Kony's rule, actions of torture, murder, rape, and mutilation against the Acholi people became commonplace. At the time of our assessment in 2008, Kony is said to have abducted between 40,000 and 100,000 youth from Northern Uganda. Children were abducted every night. Early in their abduction, many were forced to kill or torture family members or neighbors to show allegiance to LRA. 14% of households in Acholiland[3] had family members violently killed during the conflict, 13% of households had family members violently disappear, and 55% of households experienced serious crimes during the conflict (SLRC, 2014). Even after the conflict had ebbed and peace talks were in progress beginning in 2006, returned abductees who escaped or were rescued were not trusted. Thus, their reintegration depended on multiple factors, including their own resilience and the ability of community members and relatives to forgive them. Further, the return of children and young adults, many of them pregnant girls, into an already acutely impoverished, survivalist society was a problem.[4]

In August 2008 I participated as a research associate in an impact assessment of two PD child protection projects. One addressed the reintegration of child soldiers in Northern Uganda and the other the trafficking of girls in East Java Indonesia. The projects were implemented by international nongovernmental organization (NGO) Save the Children with funding from the Oak Foundation. This instrumental case study details some of the findings from the assessment of the project: *Life after the LRA: Piloting Positive Deviance with Child Mothers and Vulnerable Girl Survivors in Northern Uganda*. Its goal was to reduce engagement in transactional and commercial sex by formerly abducted and vulnerable girls by strengthening peer support networks, identifying sustainable reintegration strategies, and facilitating access to social services. While most international NGOs work to identify root causes, promote the adoption of best practices, or provide relief—and Save the Children is no exception—this project utilized PD as a participatory, asset-based approach to identify and amplify local outlier practices.

PD Inquiry: Define, Determine, Discover

Define. To enter into conversations with community members in Northern Uganda local SCiU coordinators employed two principles of PD: "go slow to go fast" and "nothing about me without me" (See Table 1, page 67). This translates into investing time in building relationships and in continuously asking who else needs to be invited into conversations. From the start of a PD project, facilitators must become adept at accounting for contextual contingency, the process and principles of PD, and logistical issues, including institutional constraints like time, funding, and replication.

SCiU coordinators held a series of meetings over several weeks. They were strategic about balancing a spirit of open invitation and garnering the support of official and unofficial leaders. Some 80 people participated in the "kick-off" meeting, including local leaders, counselors, committee representatives, and community residents. The phrase "formerly abducted" as a label for former child soldiers was not easy for any of them to say; neither was "transactional sex." These had become taboos, and abductees were seen as pariahs. Thus, SCiU coordinators facilitated conversations that got at the issue in indirect ways. The community named the following issues *around* reintegration: PTSD, fighting, isolation, movement in and out of camps, lack of market opportunities for local products. They agreed that these issues were the most pressing and if addressed, problems of reintegration would be minimized.

Concurrently with initial meetings SCiU coordinators worked with the community to establish baseline data. This is crucial to the definition of the problem because it helps to focus conversations—and controversies—around the problem using actual numbers. Initial data can be generated empirically or borrowed from existing data pools. Establishing a baseline in Northern Uganda was more complex as at the time of the intervention civil conflict-related data was linked mostly to food security and health, so SCiU relied on what empirical data they could secure along with community observations. Had they had the benefit of concrete numbers directly related to reintegration, such as malnutrition rates as the Sternins did in Vietnam, the process of problem definition, which is

ultimately linked to outcomes, would have been more straightforward or less subjective (A.P. 2007d).

Determine. SCiU coordinators and community volunteers formed a core PD team. The PD team determined that the greatest barriers to reintegration were poverty and issues of trust. Hence, they used these barriers to frame a carefully phrased PD question: *In the face of a diminished economy and with all of the trust issues implicated in the return of girls who had committed atrocities while in captivity or who bore children of LRA commanders, were there any girls who, without access to special resources, had been able to reestablish community ties and find acceptable sources of income?* The PD question contained the key variables for inclusion: (1) former abductee; (2) girl or teenager; (3) possibly pregnant or a young mother; (4) had reestablished relationships and trust; (5) did not engage in transactional sex; (6) and did not have access to special assistance or resources—human or capital that would give them an "edge" over other girls in similar circumstances.

To determine the existence of statistical outliers, two months after initial meetings, five subcounties covering a population of 55,561 engaged in asset mapping over the course of five days. The PD principles of "don't talk about me without me" and "who else should be here?" were in full effect as formerly abducted and vulnerable girls themselves helped to identify peers and survivors. Mapping participants, comprising a total of 100 locals, also included government officials, counselors, women concerned with children's issues, and volunteers. The PD team briefed all participants ahead of time through letters and meetings. The purpose of mapping activities was to identify and locate:

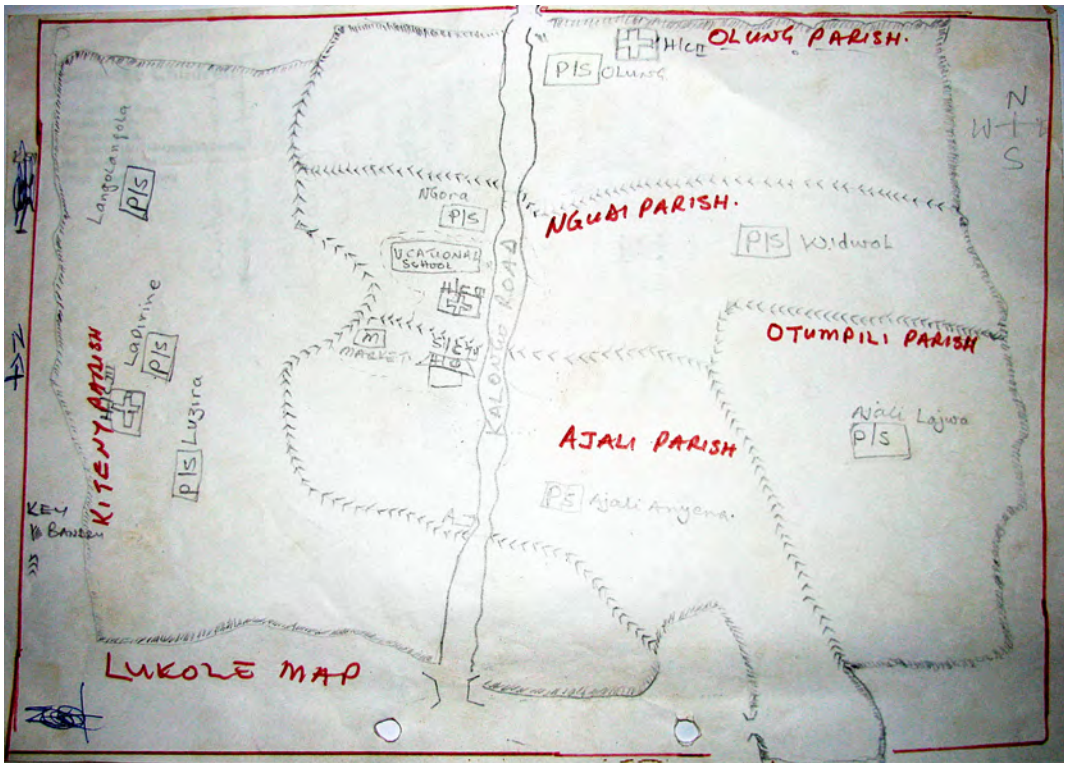
- Primary communal structural features, e.g., means of livelihood distribution, local community groups, health services distribution, education.
- Contextual features related to risk, e.g., social gathering points, night clubs, bars, shops, and video halls.
- Locations of survivors and vulnerable girls.

- Positive deviants, i.e., survivors and vulnerable girls who were able to work in the local markets and who were socially accepted—against the norm, which involved resorting to transactional sex, violence, and isolation (A.P. 2007b).

Participants drew the maps on the ground using sticks and ash. The PD team then transferred the maps onto poster-sized paper (See Figure 2). As with other meetings, related issues were identified—migration due to lack of employment opportunities, sexual abuse of girls, sexually transmitted diseases, male-to-female sexual harassment and sexual violence. 190 girls met the initial requirements for PD based on certain criteria: age, young mother, head of household or living with

Figure 2.

Community map indicating schools, churches, health services, social gathering points and their proximity to PD girls



elderly/disabled family members, formerly abducted, and school drop-out. In a manner akin to snowball sampling, through those girls, other girls were identified for a total of 330. The community then determined whether any of them had access to special resources, for instance girls whose families gave them a house or girls who had a wealthier family member who took care of them had certain advantages that were not replicable or accessible to others. After going through this process of determining special resources about 300 girls were left.

Discover. To identify PD behaviors and strategies, the community engaged in a rapid, qualitative study conducted using individual interviews, focus group discussions, and observation. Doing this in teams allows "vetting" of PD status and of behaviors and strategies. This process happened in three rounds. The first round yielded interesting discussion around income generation and psychosocial coping but not concrete behaviors and practices that could be amplified and replicated by others. Having to do this in multiple iterations can be frustrating for facilitators needing to meet deadlines. However, it is common with first time practitioners as concrete practices and behaviors require very deliberate language and framing. Repeating parts of the process that do not go as envisioned required facilitators in Uganda to revisit the "go slow to go fast principle." After the two additional rounds SCiU staff documented the following PD behaviors and strategies:

- **Engaging in crop-growing, selling, and other income-generating activities**: mixes seeds to grow multiple seasonal crops; looks for other forms of income such as selling small fish or clothes.

- **Working harder and longer than others:** picks up an extra load of firewood or a jerry-can of water to sell; works an extra hour or two in the field.

- **Working collaboratively to grow and sell crops:** rotates fieldwork with her friends and is able to be more efficient in managing farm work, childcare, and buying and selling.

- **Exhibiting self-respect and polite interpersonal behaviors:** shows respect to "aunties," parents, and elders and seeks their advice and in turn builds trust.

- **Saving money and reinvesting it in productive enterprises:** uses money to buy farm animals to sell later or a bicycle to make her travel time between the field, home, and school more efficient.

- **Attending school and participating in social activities:** makes time for school and socializes or plays netball—similar to volleyball—to keep her mind busy and to stay involved. (Singhal & Dura, 2009a and Singhal & Dura, 2009b)

PD Intervention: Design, Discern, Disseminate

Design. PD flips the script of conventional logics about change. While many believe that changed knowledge leads to changed practices, PD starts with the belief that changed practices lead to changed knowledge. The KAP model for behavior change proposes that increased knowledge (K) leads to a change in attitudes (A) and consequently to a change in practice (P). This model prevails in awareness campaigns. In addition to flipping the PD question by focusing on existing solutions, PD proposes that practicing new behaviors can change attitudes and those changes become new knowledge, i.e., it follows a PAK model (Refer to "Design" in Table 1). PD projects aim to create the conditions for communities to "act their way into a new way of thinking."

To amplify and operationalize PD behaviors and practices, and to generate new ideas, SCiU formed 15 peer groups—3 groups per subcounty—and selected 20 mentors. PD behaviors and the girls' interests drove content for group discussions and meetings. Training meetings helped with capacity-building and income generation. They provided an opportunity for girls to share their tried and true practices and also to learn new ones through SCiU. Recreational meetings encouraged psychosocial coping and distraction, e.g., though socializing and playing sports. And sensitization meetings provided a forum to discuss the dangers of transactional sex and ways to avoid it. Meetings were held at least once

a week, and in addition to peers and mentors, counselors and local officials were invited to participate, promoting accountability and support. In between meetings, the girls practiced new behaviors.

Discern. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are essential to ensure projects meet funding goals and objectives. PD projects add one more layer to M&E practices. As part of M&E efforts, PD facilitators encourage self-monitoring and learn about what counts for community stakeholders, i.e., what are their cultural beacons? Cultural beacons are culturally-embedded, locally-relevant signs of change (Dura, Felt, & Singhal, 2014). They are easy for outsiders and "experts" to overlook. For example, on one of our walks to the fields where PD girls were growing crops, we pointed out a couple of g-nuts (peanuts) on the ground. A member of the SCiU local team pointed out that during the peak of conflict due to the scarcity of food, you would have never seen peanuts on the ground or birds flying over the IDP camps. Peanuts on the ground then, were a cultural beacon.

So, to fulfill institutional M&E requirements, SCiU requested internal reports from staff to monitor progress, conducted a survey, and employed external evaluators (our team). Additionally, facilitators, mentors, community leaders, and peer leaders also gauged success based on attendance and participation and appropriate utilization of livelihood support, and visible signs. But to encourage self-monitoring and evaluation, the implementation team asked community members to set standards for success and track their progress on an ongoing basis. To do this, participants reported their progress at weekly meetings. Cultural beacons that participants noted included an increase in garden (field) sizes as well as in crop production and yield, continual weeding, and unexpected group formations, e.g., in addition to sensitization and recreation groups some girls and their mentors gathered to talk about appropriate child care practices, e.g., nutrition and feeding (A.P. 2007g).

Disseminate. Postproject research findings indicate that PD project participants exhibited higher levels of self-confidence and self-efficacy, sustained psychosocial practices, educational participation, and income generation (Singhal & Dura,

2009a). A year and a half from the start of the pilot, 75 community members, with the help of SCiU staff, conducted a second mapping activity to track movement from main IDP camps to satellite camps and identify new potential participants as a means of scaling up the project to 550. The PD project continued as long as funding continued.[5]

An Alternative for Socially Just Community-Based Work

In the previous section I presented an instrumental case study with the aim of describing how the PD process can be applied in a Global South context. Here, I analyze the case of Northern Uganda through a rhetorical lens to answer the questions: (1) How does PD enable transformational research and in doing so respond to calls for socially just approaches to community-based work? And, (2) what unique contributions might professional communicators make in interdisciplinary PD projects?

A Rhetorical Flip with a Focus on Action

PD asks *What's right here? What's working when it shouldn't be working*? Asking the PD question is the first step towards rewriting community narratives from the perspective of assets or from the inside out. It is, I contend, PD's most salient social justice attribute, and a contribution to previous work in organizational narratives and identity (See Bazerman, 1999 and Faber 2002). Asking a different question yields different answers and is immediately accessible to anyone. If we accept Grabill's (2001, 2007, 2011) proposition that we construct communities as we work, that is, symbolically, PD creates a community around assets. By promoting asset-based, participatory inquiry, PD fosters a sense of alterity—of getting to know the self through others "just like me," and this changes the narrative of what is possible. In Northern Uganda, by foregrounding tacit knowledge and witnessing each other's successes, participants began to replace their negative self-perception with a positive self-perception at both the individual and collective levels.

PD is based on the premise that solutions can be anywhere—not just among traditional experts. In Northern Uganda solutions to reintegration lurked amongst the least likely suspects: formerly abducted and vulnerable girls. One of the greatest challenges of participatory community-based work is for facilitators to let go of assumptions and truly *believe* in grassroots expertise (Dura, Singhal, & Elias, 2013). For instance, a PD practitioner must be comfortable with the fact that in a hospital expertise can reside with cleaning staff, patient transporters, and patients themselves—not just with physicians or administrators (Singhal, Buscell, & Lindberg, 2014). Because invitation and inclusion are built into PD's rhetorical framing, and because relationships are critical to PD, participation and reciprocity are more likely, or at least available. PD's principles of invitational rhetoric (Greiner & Singhal, 2009), for each step of the inquiry and of the intervention, such as "don't talk about me without me" and "who else needs to be here?" can be helpful guideposts, but they are challenging to enact, especially within hierarchical structures.

There is also an important capacity-building aspect to PD's participatory, asset-based inquiry. PD as it was carried out in Northern Uganda involved community members from volunteers to local officials in mixed methods research. They used quantitative data to codefine a problem and to establish the existence of outliers, and they used observations, focus groups, and interviews to identify PD behaviors. Ideally, they would be in a position to apply these methods to other issues. Once a community has experience with the process, its members can transfer the procedural knowledge they have gained to other situations. Since we do not have longitudinal data on this subject, the actual occurrence of this is impossible to determine. This type of transfer or horizontal scaling has been noted in some applications of PD but has yet to be tested and theorized further (See Singhal & Dura, 2009a; Dura, Singhal, & Felt, 2014).

Another socially just aspect of PD is its strong emphasis on "doing" both in the identification of concrete PD behaviors and practices and in their implementation. PD favors "acting our way into a new way of thinking" (PAK) as opposed to the more typical "thinking our way into a new way of acting" (KAP). This carries an ontological dimension of "rewriting" our sense of who we are in

the world through material practices. In Northern Uganda the PD Inquiry enabled girls to see themselves through the mirror of their peers. PD practices provided concrete anchors for this mirroring process as the behaviors selected were available to anyone in the community—the girls could see themselves putting them into practice easily and immediately. Girls "acted their way" into persuasion, and the meetings and workshops held during the intervention stage provided spaces for feedback and support. Thus, regular action and meetings helped feed into the sense of alterity established in the discovery stage of PD.

Closing the Gap between Participatory Theory and Practice

Jones and Walton (forthcoming) posited that in professional communication socially just work explores ways to "amplify the agency of oppressed people—those who are materially, socially, politically, and/or economically underresourced." While PD can certainly strengthen individual and collective agency through asset-based, participatory inquiry and action, critical and reflexive praxis is needed to bring about PD's fullest potential. Professional communicators can help ensure critical praxis of PD by relying on theoretical and conceptual knowledge accumulated by the field. We are in a position not only to adopt PD, but to adapt it. In doing so, we can address theory-to-practice gaps in socially just community-based work while simultaneously contributing to a more ethical practice of PD. I see this happening in at least three ways.

First, as a professional communicator who takes a rhetorical approach, there exist immediate applications for disciplinary concepts such as stasis and rhetorical listening in PD projects. Stasis offers a systematic way of fostering clarity during problem definition and qualitative data gathering. It can be a very appealing and pragmatic tool for PD practitioners. Rhetorical listening might be less tangible or more subjective to enact, but it can help to close the theory to practice gap in facilitating grassroots knowledge, especially during the relationship-building process, which takes time. Ratcliffe (2005) described rhetorical listening as a way of "standing under" others as a way to understand them. This notion of standing under and listening with intent helps position

practitioners, who are used to leading or being the experts, as learners. Such is not a small shift. Community members not only hold valuable, tacit knowledge, i.e., PD practices, they also know if behaviors are replicable and if they are uncommon. The more grassroots knowledge drives a PD project, the more likely it is to be sustained. So while stasis can be used in an outward way, rhetorical listening can be used to do the inner work invited by PD.

Second, professional communicators can engage in PD critically and reflexively. For example, we cannot assume that PD in and of itself furthers social justice. PD can be used in the private sector, as was the case in Mexico where it was used to increase pharmaceutical sales (Merck Mexico Team, 2006)—arguably not a socially just cause. PD can also be misused or corrupted. Even with the best intentions a PD intervention can go awry. For instance, it can be top-down imperative for people to "buy into" disguised as a participatory, bottom-up approach. In this sense it is crucial for professional communicators to approach PD critically and be alert to coercive language and practices (Grabill, 2001).

Critical scholars might also argue that addressing systemic issues is an ethical imperative of socially just work. One of PD's greatest strengths, its focus on assets, can be perceived as its greatest limitation. If PD ignores systemic issues and root causes, its quest for change can be myopic. Take for example the PD practice of working longer and harder noted in the case of Northern Uganda. How is working longer and harder a good thing? Although I agree that going the extra mile can be regarded in a positive way, PD adopters are well served by a critical stance. This said, I would argue that the purpose of PD is not to address systemic issues or root causes directly—in fact, PD is valuable *because* it does not wait for root causes to be addressed. In a sense, PD "hacks" around them. There is no reason issues of policy cannot be designed into PD research or PD interventions, especially when local governments are involved. In nutritional interventions that used PD in Indonesia, work with local and national government officials was tantamount (Singhal & Dura, 2009a). By keeping in mind root causes and systemic issues, professional communicators can find creative ways to ensure the process is empowering and sustainable beyond a single study or intervention.

Lastly, there is much room for scholarship on PD. My involvement in Northern Uganda was limited to an impact assessment. In line with the spirit of PD, our team utilized participatory sketching and narration activities (Singhal & Dura, 2009) to elicit cultural beacons, visible signs of change as they were perceived by program participants. As communication specialists, we each engaged in the intercultural rhetorical practices that we felt would suit the context best. Other than that, we did not have any part in the PD inquiry or intervention. Nonetheless, a good amount of publishable research has come from our experience as evaluators, such as the emergence of the concept of cultural beacons described in the "Discern" section of the case study. Beyond direct involvement in PD projects, professional communicators can engage in scholarship and theory-building around PD. We can look at ways that inquiry and capacity-building can be improved upon for greater sustainability. Unless capacity-building happens systematically and is articulated explicitly as such, the procedural knowledge community members gain by engaging in PD may not be valued or may be lost. Professional communicators who engage in transfer research and pedagogy, may be able to contribute to the sustainability and replication challenges of PD. We can also delve deeper into other aspects of PD, such as the ways PD challenges the KAP paradigm by proposing that material practices can create knowledge.[6] All in all, our involvement with PD can be quite reciprocal!

Conclusion

PD offers professional communicators—students, researchers, and practitioners—an alternative framework for socially just community-based work both in Global South contexts and beyond. It flips our paradigms: from deficit-based to asset-based, from action to inquiry, from textual practices to material practices. In this sense, PD has strong pedagogical potential. It not only offers students of professional communication an alternative framework for research or methodology for applied work, it carries implications for the intellectual work of teaching and learning as it challenges current paradigms by asking the PD question and focusing on action. The rhetorical and intercultural work of and

around PD is just beginning. Future directions can examine the ways professional communicators put PD—or parts of it—into practice, the challenges they face, such as rhetorical framing for top-down and bottom-up support, and the rhetorical applications or insights, e.g., in invitational rhetoric, intercultural rhetoric, risk communication. I invite other professional communicators to join me on this PD journey and to carve out new paths. ■

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Notes

[1] Grabill (2007) made the following connection about community-based work and participatory action research: "Community-based researchers share with participatory action researchers a concern—supported by considerable evidence—that traditional research simply relocated to the community can be useless and even violent."

[2] The results of the study have been published as a monograph, a case study, and a journal article (See Singhal & Dura, 2009a; Singhal & Dura, 2009b; and Dura & Singhal, 2011).

[3] This is just one region in Northern Uganda. Each region was affected similarly but to different extents. The Advisory Consortium on Conflict Sensitivity (2013)

reported in its Northern Uganda Conflict Analysis (Retrieved from http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ACCS_Northern_Uganda_Conflict_Analysis_Report.pdf) that the Acholi region carries with it historic perceptions of neglect. It comprises one of the smallest yet poorest segments of Uganda's population. Postconflict, the region continues to deal with major issues such as unequal distribution of development, land disputes, sexual and gender-based violence, youth unemployment and crime, difficulties in reintegration.

[4] There are heuristic tools for this, such as the "Discovery and Action Dialogue" (http://www.liberatingstructures.com/10-discovery-action-dialogue/), which reframes participant responses around "problems" by asking them if there are any exceptions to the problems and/or to probe on the basis of what they are specifically "doing" differently and whether they can describe those behaviors. PD facilitators also resort to creative techniques such as improvisation.

[5] I have kept in touch with A.P. from SCiU, and through informal conversations over Skype have learned that since the end of the funding cycle (in late 2008 or early 2009) A.P. has been working with different organizations. Nonetheless, as a resident of the local area she has kept in touch with project participants and has said that over the years she has observed or received news that some of the PD girls and their mentors continue to thrive.

[6] Recently, PD scholars and practitioners in various disciplines, particularly communication and public health, are taking PD in new directions and experimenting with KAP approaches at the intervention stage. They are using PD as a research lens and using the PD data to inform awareness campaigns that utilize creative mass media methods such as Entertainment-Education and Transmedia Storytelling (See Bouman, Lubjuhn, & Singhal, 2014; Dura, Kallman, Diaz, Boyd, Molinar, Ayala, & Singhal, 2015). Rather than taking the PAK approach to behavior change described in the case of Northern Uganda, these scholars and practitioners propose that while we learn by doing, we also learn vicariously through entertaining and educational media, which relies on carefully crafted, relatable narratives for persuasion (See Bandura, 1971; Slater, M.D., 2002 and Singhal, Sharma, Papa, & Witte, 2004). Pairing PD Inquiries with more KAP-based interventions is less common but makes sense in different circumstances, e.g., in larger scale projects. So although the PAK component is unique and promotes ownership and participation, professional communicators can adapt the approach for different contexts.

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