Advocacy-Based Research

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Abstract:

In this chapter, readers learn about advocacy-based research, a form of participatory action research and community-engaged research. Inclusion, reciprocity, asset-based approaches to research and practice are discussed as foundation concepts. When and why to use advocacy-based research and the process characteristics of an advocacy-based research approach are discussed. The content of the chapter not only articulates the steps needed but also draws attention to process-oriented questions that can and should help direct a collaborative advocacy-based research study. The steps and the internal process of a researcher are highlighted in a case example that illustrates sample research questions, definition of purpose and focus, design of intervention, implementation, analysis and interpretation, and evaluation of the collaborative process.

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Article:

We come from diverse fields (education, counseling, peace and conflict studies), study different social phenomena, and are comfortable with various research methodologies. As social scientists, however, our fields share common historical storylines that shape what counts as legitimate knowledge, what kinds of methods are considered rigorous, the kind of training needed to produce scholarly knowledge, and the desired audiences for the knowledge we produce. Often, these historical storylines encourage researchers to maintain emotional and cognitive distance between themselves and the populations they study. The advocacy-based research approach, however, blurs some of those traditional boundaries by asking questions grounded in the needs of the communities in which we work. The intention of the research is collaborative, including a wide array of academics and/or professionals *with* the individuals and communities connected to the individuals of focus, to make a direct and positive change to the situation or issue driving the research or inquiry. Issues of objectivity, the minimization of bias, and generalizability, which

are important in other forms of research, are replaced with intentions to develop relational understanding. Perhaps a parallel example is the two ways you might think about a client—the cognitive process that goes through the back of your mind as you try to assess or diagnose concerns and the here-and-now efforts to build empathy and a good working alliance that are happening in the foreground.

Advocacy-based research allows you to gain a deep understanding of and appreciation for the interconnectedness of individuals through relationships and systems. Indeed, most time in this methodology is invested in the early phases, engaging with community members and building collaborations. An advocacy-based researcher values the knowledge that is gained through lived experiences and remembers to view the strengths and assets of the community, not just the challenges. Researchers try to support the development of relationships and the identification of new knowledge and resources. Many times, the knowledge needed to understand and solve a problem already exists within the community but has not been previously connected. For example, people who do not have health insurance may have identified some resources for their health concerns (e.g., speak to my pastor, take my children to free health clinics, work in the community garden so I can bring home fresh vegetables) that practitioners may not know about unless they honor community members' knowledge by asking.

This approach to research is grounded in tenants of participatory action research and community engaged research. Advocacy-based researchers are intentionally advocacy focused when they seek to support, advocate for, and empower the individuals and communities they serve through a process of investigation. The purpose is to advocate for that which makes individuals and communities healthy, vibrant, and socially just. This means that in this form of research, you work with advocates and may be an advocate yourself. Forms of advocacy-based research require an inclusive, reciprocal, and asset-based approach to engaging with individuals and the communities to which they are connected. We call this research "advocacy-based research," which aligns with a relatively new wave of other scholarship forms like scholar activism, participatory action research (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013), community-engaged scholarship (Barnes et al., 2016) or implementation science (LeMahieu, Grunow, Baker, Nordstrum, & Gomez, 2017).

Doing work as an advocacy scholar, scholar activist, participatory action researcher, or community-engaged scholar demands new tool sets, rules for how to conduct research, roles for researchers and participants, timelines to consider, and meanings of "impact." This kind of research brings two historically polar roles (advocate and scholar) and ways of knowing, *together*. Our chapter is not an exhaustive resource for approaches to advocacy-based research but is meant to provide some tools to create dialogue about the meanings and goals of research, breaking us out of historical dualisms of expert/nonexpert and researcher/participant that have unnecessarily limited the full scope of how research might foster healthy individuals and just communities. If you let yourself take on the role of "curious consultant," what might you learn by listening to your client with a sense of openness and respect?

Who Generates Knowledge?

If research is about generating knowledge for the purpose of understanding why and how, then it is critical to ask the question: Who generates knowledge? How is it created? Where is knowledge contained? In an advocacy-based research approach, you would take the view that knowledge is not held solely by counselors, researchers, and professionals who have formal training, certifications, and degrees, but that knowledge is also held by and generated in collaboration with those who are the focal point of the study. In this way, knowledge is gained not only through study of scholarly based literature and thought but also through engagement with individuals who have direct, lived experience.

Knowledge generated through reflection on and investigation of lived experiences is as legitimate and critical to creating informed understanding as knowledge that is gained through training and coursework. It is the *integration* of lived and scholarship-based knowledge that generates new insights and maximizes the potential to make a meaningful difference through inquiry. For example, imagine reading a textbook about substance abuse and then sitting in front of a client who is trying to break the cycle of addiction. Neither alone is sufficient; both are necessary. In what follows, we outline tenets of advocacy-based research. While these are not exhaustive, they provide a starting place for thinking about what counts as credible research while generating knowledge with this methodology.

Advocacy-based approaches to research require inclusion, reciprocity, and asset-based thinking and processes. The **inclusion** of more individuals with diverse viewpoints in developing understanding about a specific individual's (e.g., student, client) interests can generate richer understandings of the context that shapes the situation, as well as the tools, resources, and people who may contribute meaningfully. Indeed, *verstehen* (understanding and empathizing with participants' point of view) and multivocality (providing spaces for a variety of perspectives) are cornerstones of excellent qualitative research (Tracy, 2010), and advocacy-based research attends to these criteria particularly well. For example, a practitioner can learn about assets already present when she or he listens attentively to a client or conducts formal/informal assessments. Beyond the inclusion of the individual, however, is also the inclusion of the broader context of support and influence. Practitioners are typically trained to work directly with clients on their presenting concerns; we encourage them, however, to also consider including other key individuals and groups in the client's community. These individuals and groups can help us understand influences and solutions that engage others beyond the designated client to create systematic and lasting positive change. In this way, inclusive advocacy research is aligned with practice.

Reciprocity, a central tenet of advocacy-based approaches to inquiry, guides a practitioner or researcher's identification and selection of coresearchers. Reciprocity builds upon inclusion in that the client's key community members are not only identified and considered but viewed as experts in the dynamics of their context and consulted with respect and a genuine desire to learn. Knowledge is created jointly; it is not separate, and it requires ongoing collaboration among all relevant stakeholders. Reciprocity is the seeking, understanding, valuing, and inclusion of the diverse resources, including knowledge, that individuals bring as collaborators on a shared effort. For example, if a client says she has experienced relief by working with a shaman or spiritual leader in interpreting her dreams, then reciprocity suggests that the shaman be included in the counseling work or research if all parties agree. In advocacy-based research, practitioners and

clients act as coinvestigators rather than as the lead or sole investigator. An important activity in advocacy-based research, therefore, is to engage with the full scope of coinvestigators. Enacting reciprocity requires you to actively identify all of those who are affected by the issue who have information that may benefit understanding and action or who could contribute to a solution. The focus on reciprocity in advocacy-based research brings to the forefront ethical issues of research, recognizing that mutual respect and dignity between you (as researcher) and your clients or clients' communities (as researched) is critical to producing valid knowledge (Tracy, 2010).

An **asset-based approach** to research and practice seeks out and draws on the talents and contributions of practitioners, students, family members, peers, cultural brokers, and other relevant service providers (e.g., educators, social workers, psychologists, clergy). Taking an asset-based approach is fully consistent with a counseling and positivistic worldview, which continually seeks to understand and build upon individual client strengths. A community-engaged advocacy approach extends this worldview to the assets that may exist at the group or systems level, in addition to the individual client level.

Purpose of Knowledge Generation: When and Why to Use an Advocacy-Based Approach

Advocacy-based research is a strategy to generate ideas about why things are the way they are for the purpose of then making recommendations that inform decisions and actions to improve the situation. An advocacy-based approach, then, is used when you seek to directly effect change in certain practices or experiences for the purpose of positive transformation, social justice, and empowerment. Practitioners and researchers involved in this research aim to make environments safer, healthier, and more vibrant for individuals, families, and communities through **empowerment**. The role of the practitioner and researcher is to emphasize the "responsibility of the people themselves who [are] making their own choices about how they [live] their lives" (Whitehead & McNiff, 2002, p. 136) and to act as a thought and action partner who is willing to commit their own talents in pursuit of that community-identified goal.

In clinical practice, we are often seeking to improve wellness and mental health outcomes for individual clients, but in this chapter, we also encourage practitioners to extend their focus beyond the individual to also consider the role of larger networks of people and to affect communities more broadly. If we consider an individual who experiences bias and discrimination in society, it is ethical behavior to both empower the individual *and* address the systemic oppression that contributes to his or her challenges. Advocacy-based research would also mean asking the "whys" about the systemic oppression and undertaking an exploration rather than just working with one client and then stopping.

As seen in the American Counseling Association Advocacy competencies (Lewis, Arnold, House & Toporek, 2003), counselors can build skills in understanding and responding to the individual, group, and systems levels. We have adapted their schema to illustrate how advocacy-based research work can include investigations undertaken with the client (e.g., offering support to ask critical questions so that clients are empowered to address an issue themselves) and on behalf of the client/student (e.g., practitioner can research the issue on behalf of the client and report back). These same activities that are enacted "with" as well as "for" clients can be undertaken at the school and community levels and in the public arena more broadly (Figure

14.1). Thus, an advocacy mindset encourages practitioners to consider both the micro level (individual client) and the macro level (systems with which client interacts). The figure highlights the significance that advocacy, empowerment, information, and collaboration can play in advocacy-based research with various partners. We will explore these styles and levels of advocacy further in the case study presented in this chapter.
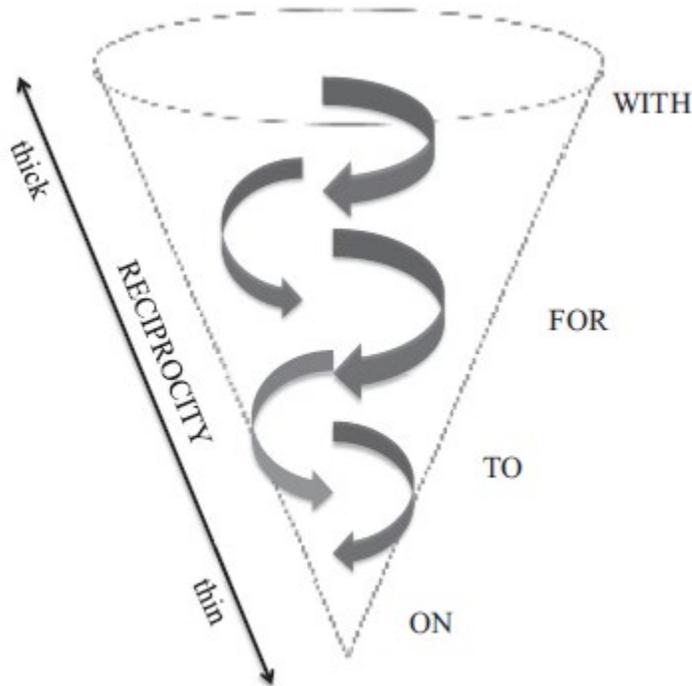

Figure 14.1. Cone of Activities Within Community-Engaged Partnerships

Process Characteristics of an Advocacy-Based Research Approach

One goal of advocacy-based *research* that distinguishes it from practice is to help counselors and clients collaboratively understand the political, cultural, social, and economic context of clients' concerns. Such understandings can empower clients to engage in problem solving and to advocate effectively on their own behalf. A researcher mindset and approach is especially useful—asking good questions, collecting relevant data, and making informed conclusions based on findings—because the concerns that clients face often are influenced by many large, complicated, and interconnected systems. Engaging diverse individuals who affect and are affected by the concern requires a continuous, collaborative, inclusive, and iterative process.

Collaboration starts at the very beginning of the interaction when defining the purpose and focus and continues through design, implementation, analysis, evaluation, and refinement. Each stage requires decisions about when, how, and with whom to collaborate as coinvestigators. Collaboration that is authentically reciprocal is challenging for many reasons, including different styles of communication, diverse experiences and perspectives, and the need for respect and trust among collaborators, as well as for logistical reasons such as time. In addition, when direct client care is involved, questions about what must remain confidential also come into consideration (for example, what can and cannot be disclosed to various collaborators). For this reason, it is helpful

to consider when activities are jointly enacted or produced and when activities are done individually, or less reciprocally.

The cone of engagement (Janke, 2013) is an image that can be helpful to understand how different levels of reciprocity can be present within a single relationship or set of relationships. The image shows how individuals in collaborative partnerships may spend time doing certain activities, within the context of an activity or an ongoing relationship, in ways that can be described as being done *on*, *to*, or *for* others, as well as *with* others more jointly.

The cone of activities within community-engaged partnerships is useful for considering micro-actions within counselor-client relationships, such as what kinds of plans and decisions do we make together, and what kinds of plans and decisions are provided *to*, made *for*, made *on* behalf of the other? For example, client and counselor team may decide together (*with*) which stress-management strategies the client would like to implement, but the counselor would have to assume more authority in safety planning *for* the client if suicidal ideation were uncovered. Over time, the micro decisions made by the counselor and client that reflect various levels of shared knowledge and decision making, or the level of reciprocity, set up patterns and expectations for future levels of reciprocity. The level of reciprocity among partners may vary across activities within a community-engaged partnership. What kinds of things do we discuss and decide together, and what do we do and decide separately? Who is becoming empowered to engage with and make decisions as they relate to various questions and issues raised through the counseling process?

Advocacy-Based Research: A Practical Illustration

In this section, we present the steps of advocacy-based research, some sample research questions, and a case illustration. Similar to other forms of research and scholarship, advocacy-based research identifies a question to investigate, designs methods to answer the question, and examines the information gathered for the purpose of creating understanding. Key steps for advocacy-based research include:

- *Definition of purpose and focus*—What is the question or issue to address? What is our purpose?
- *Design of intervention or activity*—Who are key stakeholders? Who needs to be involved? What conversations or initiatives are needed? How will we collect information to know what we seek to know? Have we considered the individual, group, and system levels?
- *Implementation*—What roles will each of us play in carrying out the activities that have been jointly designed? Who has been empowered to engage with the issues?
- *Analysis and Interpretation*—What do we each make of what we saw? What more do we need to know? What works and why? How do we share what we know?
- *Evaluation of the collaborative process*—What could be done to improve our collaboration as coinvestigators? What might we do differently or keep the same in the future?

In the advocacy-based research case study we explore in what follows, the school counselor faces many choices. Among these are: she must decide how to define the scope of the problem she is observing, how to gather needed information and from whom, how to identify key collaborators, how to make sense of the additional perspectives she gathers, and who should be empowered to act. Throughout this work, she must keep in mind the needs of her identified client (student) and also consider who she needs to contact and what she needs to know and do more broadly at both the individual and systems levels.

Sample Research Questions

Advocacy-based research, applied to counseling, is useful for answering a number of questions. These questions to be investigated through inclusive and reciprocal collaborations include:

- What core competencies must a practitioner develop to work with underserved populations to ensure that they are serving individuals appropriately and meeting their needs effectively?
- What are the factors that influence the feelings of safety for a student or client working with a practitioner?
- How can practitioners enhance their ability to generate a strong working alliance with social identity groups different from their own?
- How do practitioners create a skills training workshop that effectively contributes to clients' understanding of and adoption of positive mental health strategies that are congruent for their worldview?
- What are the barriers and facilitators to students or clients from underserved groups seeking—or not seeking—services and mental health care?
- How do practitioners partner effectively with community-serving groups (e.g., churches, advocates, health care providers) or key cultural brokers (e.g., community leaders) that have expertise with specific populations of clients?

Case Study

We present a case study for the purpose of clarifying the choice points that can be made throughout the various components of advocacy-based research, from the beginning of inquiry through the later stages of analysis and interpretation. The case is somewhat lengthy, but that is consistent with the advocacy-based research methodology, in which questions would unfold gradually and continue to be modified as more voices were included. We ask you to stand in the school counselor's shoes and see what questions and thoughts would emerge for you as we walk through her process of engaging with a student and the systems he lives in.

Crystal is a school counselor working with Jorge, a ninth-grade adolescent from an immigrant family. She is having a routine scheduling conversation with him about potential courses for the upcoming semester when he shares, potentially inadvertently, that someone in his family is not legally documented as residing in the United States (i.e., is "undocumented"). Crystal experiences a moment of doubt and panic as she realizes that she does not know how best to advise the student regarding his future goals. Learning of his family member's undocumented status causes her to wonder whether Jorge is himself documented. If not, is he eligible to attend

college, if that is his goal? Would his family member be in danger of deportation if Jorge signed up for the PSAT with identifying information or completed a financial aid application with his parents' information? Crystal's head was full of potential scenarios, questions, and concerns. She was familiar with advocacy-based research and viewed the methodology as an opportunity to find possible solutions to her questions.

Definition of Purpose and Focus

Taking the time to reflect on one's intentions—what one hopes to be able to understand and to do as a result of her or his research—is a critical first step to crafting an effective process for investigation and action. In a more engaged approach, this question cannot be answered by you (or the professional) alone; discovery and definition of purpose is a jointly constructed activity.

After a few more conversations to clarify the issues and build some initial trust, Crystal and Jorge decide that they want to address the question: **What is the most effective way to support Jorge's educational and career development?** *Their shared intent is to identify, together, the opportunities that Jorge seeks and any potential barriers or facilitators toward that goal. Beyond their shared goal of assisting Jorge, Crystal identifies a broader goal and research question:* **What are the facilitators and barriers to supporting students of undocumented parents in pursuing their chosen educational and career ambitions?**

DESIGN OF INTERVENTION OR ACTIVITY

Design occurs when individuals plan the details of what needs to happen in order to address a question and create an informed decision or action. A design can be created individually (i.e., what I think should be done), or it can be approached in a way that invites all of those who are involved in the situation to inform plans for activities, collaborators, and timelines. When design is crafted collaboratively, it allows for diverse voices to be heard, encourages creative yet feasible ideas, and helps to gain buy-in from those who are most intimately involved and whose support may be needed in the future.

One possible avenue for action is to consult with school administrators, school counseling peers, or professional organizations as the "experts" who can illuminate these questions and help Crystal find answers. This set of information-seeking actions is an important part of a school counselor's approach. However, an advocacy-based research approach would also expand who Crystal consults to include Jorge, his family, and potentially even immigrant-serving agencies in their community.

Important questions to consider when choosing who to include as a coresearcher are: What would Crystal miss if she only consulted with her professional network and then translated that information into a solution for Jorge? Would she be acting "with" Jorge and students like him or acting in a less reciprocal manner, making recommendations about what he should or should not do, presumably on his behalf? If there were no immigrants or allies among the school administrators, school counseling peers, or professional networks, would Crystal be receiving a partially informed set of strategies that might or might not end up being helpful to Jorge? How can a service provider with some socially granted privileges (educated and working in a

professional setting, US citizen) start to learn about a population with fewer social privileges in order to determine whether the clients are being served appropriately?

Starting collaboration in this very first step is important because it sets norms about working together through all phases of inquiry. Just as importantly, if not even more so, different people may have different ideas about what is happening, who is involved, and what should be done. In this way, the same issue is being viewed from very different perspectives. A practitioner, then, cannot assume that her/his ideas are exactly the same as those of people who are directly involved in the situation. It is critical, therefore, to find out who needs to be involved, and to uncover what they think is occurring and what needs to be addressed.

As Crystal and Jorge work together to define how they will go about answering their questions, they both realize that they would like to involve a broader set of stakeholders for this exploration. Crystal wonders, in addition to consulting with her professional peers, what would it look like to consult with the community most directly affected? She feels strongly that she is missing information about undocumented immigration status and how that influences daily realities and educational planning. She is also now acutely aware that she does not know Jorge's parents, as they did not attend the open house at the beginning of the year. Crystal begins to make a list of more community-based avenues to generate knowledge about the dilemmas that Jorge is facing.

Ana, the ESL teacher, also is a potential coinvestigator, someone who could help them to answer the question about how to best support Jorge's educational and professional development goals. Crystal learns from Ana about the many students at their school who have an undocumented parent and some of the challenges they face. Now, in addition to Jorge's face in her mind, she starts to see a group of students at their school with similar and very specific needs. She feels that she does not know enough to define the concerns these students might have or determine whether the school is meeting their needs and is certain that she needs to become better informed first. She searches for bilingual service providers in the community and finds a church with a Spanish-language service near the school, an immigration attorney, and a mental health agency with one Spanish-speaking social worker. She starts to write out the questions that she wants to ask each of those individuals, if they are willing to consult with her.

In her effort to address her two research questions, Crystal begins to meet with various service providers to immigrant communities. Crystal is humbled to realize that the service providers all know each other and are in regular contact around the needs of immigrant families. In fact, they have a monthly networking meeting that they invite her to attend in order to hear more directly about the emergent issues that they are working to address. Crystal chooses to attend meetings regularly, and in doing so, she learns a tremendous amount about the needs of the local immigrant community, including undocumented members. She starts to gain a greater appreciation for the resilience, optimism, and persistence of these families who gave up everything that was familiar in order to pursue a new life in the United States. She learns that the immigrants present in her community come from almost every part of the globe, not just from Mexico as the evening news might suggest. She feels that she is becoming a better-informed partner to Jorge and more capable of addressing their questions.

As a result of engaging directly with this community of practitioners, Crystal becomes comfortable enough to start asking questions in the monthly meetings and starts to see this group as her informal consultants around the complicated issues that she is uncovering at school. She wonders if the school leadership would be open to learning from these community members as she has or including some of them formally on the school's advisory board. She is not fully certain of what needs to happen to support Jorge and other students at school, but she is coming to a better understanding of the social and political context in which they live.

The next time Crystal sees Jorge, she feels that she has a better understanding of the dynamics of families with mixed documentation status. Because she is interested in how best to support his educational and professional development beyond high school and is new to advocacy-based research and practice, she asks Jorge to help her decide an appropriate balance of acting for and with him and his family. Although Jorge wants to advocate for himself and family, he realizes that he and his family are likely to suffer repercussions for speaking up. Jorge does start to share more about his home situation, his hopes, dreams, and fears, and thus adds to the picture that Crystal has been forming. Together they start to identify options and resources for Jorge's postgraduation pathway. With every step they take forward, more questions come up, but they start to utilize the community network to find more adequate information specific to families with mixed documentation status and keep making progress on Jorge's plan.

Implementation

Implementation is the process of translating ideas and plans into action. A collaborative approach to implementation means that many different parties are included in taking action, not just a single professional or person. A collaborative approach is especially helpful to create welcome spaces for people with diverse histories, experiences, and perspectives. Each person brings different relationships, networks, and abilities to communicate effectively with various individuals and groups. For example, consider how the style of the conversation (such as tone and openness), as well as the content, can be changed depending on who is involved—between friends, a parent and her or his student, a school counselor and a student, or a psychiatrist and a student.

Crystal feels better about her ability to create an educational plan together with Jorge and to connect him to some community resources that could help him. In addition to her networking outside of the school, Crystal schedules lunch once a week with Ana. Together they devise a system for Spanish-speaking parents to submit written questions anonymously to Ana, which Crystal then researches and answers in a newsletter that Ana translates and distributes to families. The initial implementation of the parent newsletter with Ana seems to be helpful to parents and students, so Crystal and Ana begin plans to organize a Spanish-language Parent Night at the end of the school year. Jorge has organized a new club for students with international connections, which he has used to encourage other students from mixed-status immigrant households to become aware of their resources and rights.

These are good implementation actions. However, Crystal becomes increasingly worried about what is happening at the systems level. She wonders what else she can do for her school so they can be more effective in addressing the concerns of the immigrant community. She starts to

create a handbook to organize the information she is gathering (e.g., educational access, health care access, resources and services, legal implications, communication and outreach strategies) and researches ways that she can share it more broadly (e.g., in the newsletter, at community functions, on a website). She wants to invite the members of the community group to review it, as they have greater expertise and scope.

Analysis and Interpretation

Throughout a collaborative research process, counselors work with the range of coinvestigators, often including the student who is the focus of the effort, in the interpretation of information. Just as we mentioned with the issue of design, different people have different ways of seeing things. What did the various collaborators see, what feelings were associated with these observations, and what meaning did they make from them? Addressing these three questions, collaboratively, serves as an invaluable process for identifying decisions and next action steps. Again, interpretation activities that include key members help ensure buy in, but also promote creativity and effectiveness. In analysis, we must ask how each stakeholder in this story makes sense out of what happened.

Crystal and Jorge have been working collaboratively throughout the process to make sense of what they have learned, not just about Jorge's efforts to advance his own well-being and the legal issues associated with his undocumented parents and family members but also as it relates to facilitators and barriers to other students who are like him in their familial situations and ambitions to pursue higher education. For example, Crystal decides to ask a parent who has been very friendly with her to cofacilitate a conversation with some other parents who receive the newsletter about what works and does not work. Together with family members of immigrant students, they discuss why the newsletter is helpful and ways to improve the content and mode of delivery. They learn that some parents are willing to contribute their own stories and recommendations for how to navigate difficult conversations, situations, and decisions. They learn that parents prefer to receive the newsletter in print form and that students are reliable in their delivery of the newsletter.

Crystal and Jorge's work together and with fellow inquirers leads to new questions to explore, such as do we imagine that the school leadership is receptive to the initiatives Crystal has started and the ways she has been using her time? How much has Crystal's advocacy-based research pervaded the school culture or reached beyond her office walls? What other daily stressors and problems would be of concern to Jorge's parents or others like them? How have Crystal, Jorge, and Ana experienced their activities together? What have been the most effective strategies in this advocacy-based research project, and how do we know that? What else does the school community still need to learn and do better? How could they move to information sharing or solutions at the district level?

At a broader level, beyond her relationship with Jorge, Crystal wonders how the knowledge that she has gathered in her community conversations could be helpful to others in her school, in the whole district, or even in the school counseling profession. The school leadership has been aware of some of Crystal's initiatives, but they have not invested much time or other resources in supporting her. Crystal believes she has become more capable of assisting this one student but

would like to have more feedback or input about that. She also feels a strong pull toward expanding her initiatives to make a difference to the school level or beyond. She wonders how the school system could do a better job of interacting with the immigrant community and if she could become an advocate for families at a larger level. At a minimum, she decides to submit a presentation proposal to the state-level school counseling conference and to make her handbook of resources available to all conference attendees.

Evaluation of the Collaborative Process

To enact an advocacy-based approach, Crystal and other key stakeholders would commit to evaluating their own process of collaboration. For example, if Crystal felt she had improved her competency, would Ana and Jorge agree with that assessment? What could she continue to improve? Did she act "for" or "with" Jorge? How could the school system become more open to the knowledge and experience of the community-based immigrant-serving entities? Could this become a formal collaboration, such as an advisory council? If there were immigrant parents who were comfortable serving in an advisory capacity, would the school system also make space for their voices to be heard? These questions will help illuminate the process of collaboration and the future steps for advocacy-based research.

At the same time that coinvestigators are analyzing the information they have jointly developed, it is important that they also discuss their own process of working together (e.g., What could be done to improve our collaboration as coinvestigators? What might we do differently or keep the same in the future?). This is important for helping everyone understand how best they can collaborate to address advocacy research questions in the future.

Crystal feels that she has as many questions now as when she started this project, but they are different questions. When Crystal asks Jorge what was most useful to him, he offers expressions of appreciation and acceptance but not many words of advice, guidance, or assessment. Crystal sometimes feels unsure as to whether there are additional contributions that he could share but is uncomfortable sharing with her. She is not sure whether this stems from her position as a counselor, their relative age or gender difference, her being of a different cultural tradition, or some other difference.

Similar to her relationship with Jorge, she wonders whether she is hearing all that she needs to hear from parents in order to serve them best. Again, she asks a parent to help facilitate a conversation about how best to communicate with school representatives, such as herself and teachers, so that they can best serve students of immigrant families.

Summary

Advocacy-based research is a methodology that is useful for instances in which you wish to address the needs and priorities of individuals and communities in ways that include them as collaborators. This is particularly important when working with individuals and communities who have experienced policies, practices, and structures that have marginalized and disempowered them in ways that diminish or limit their abilities to self-advocate. Key points to remember are: (1) advocacy may occur at the individual level, at the group level, or in the public

domain, and (2) collaborating through reciprocal processes is a core tenet of advocacy-based research and requires that individuals and communities are included as collaborators in all phases of the research process. An authentically reciprocal process demonstrates respect for the lived knowledge, cultures, resources, preferences, and values of the individuals you are working with and the communities of which they are a part. The methods selected by the collaborative research team may draw from qualitative and quantitative traditions and strategies described elsewhere in this book. The difference in this approach is that decisions throughout the research process, including the questions to focus on, the methods to investigate the questions, and the strategies to analyze the findings and share results, are codeveloped from start to finish. Through the process of advocacy-based research, individuals and communities are strengthened to become their own best advocates.

In terms of the classroom that you may be sitting in right now, how could an advocacy-based research perspective be useful in improving your professional practice? Can faculty members help you formulate and start to answer questions that are relevant to your future work setting and the populations you intend to serve? These questions can be qualitative, as modeled here, but may also be quantitative or mixed methods. In the end, an advocacy-based research question is one that includes the researcher-practitioner and the clients/community members in a collaborative relationship. The emphasis is much more on democratic engagement with others to create shared understanding and ask the most inclusive questions (a methodology or approach to generating knowledge) and much less on a particular type of data collection or analysis (a research method).

Advocacy-based research is an important approach for counselors who seek to effect change not only at the individual level but also at a broader systems level that forms the environment in which individual students/clients live. As we saw in the case, Crystal acted as an advocacy-based researcher for and with Jorge (an individual), for and with similar students and parents (groups), and for and with her school system and her professional organizations (systems). She consulted not only with experts within her school (Jorge, Ana) but also with experts based in the affected community (immigrant-serving providers). This approach is unique from other ways of counseling in that it requires the practitioner to view her or his role and relationship differently from traditional notions that position a practitioner as "the helper" and the student/client as the "one with problems to be solved." Advocacy-based research intentionally seeks out the assets and strengths that already exist within individuals and communities. The role of the practitioner is to identify questions that, through the attempt to answer them, create understanding, as well as foster and support the development of relationships and activities that serve the larger goal of supporting healthy and vibrant individuals and communities.

Resources for More Information

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Questions for Further Review and Application

1. What are the benefits and challenges of doing advocacy-based research?
2. When would you choose to do advocacy-based research? When would you NOT choose to do advocacy-based research?
3. What are some potential ethical dilemmas involved in advocacy-based research? How could you work to minimize those dilemmas as you proceed with your research?
4. Think about a potential advocacy-based research approach in your field. What are some ways that you, the investigator, might build relationships with community members? What are some obstacles that you might face, and how can you work with partners to overcome those obstacles?

Table 14.1. Advocacy-Based Research

Micro Level: Advocacy with Individuals	Meso Level: Advocacy with Groups	Macro Level: Advocacy in the Public Domain
Acting "with" clients to empower them (e.g., helping someone decide and/or act on their own behalf)	Acting "with" groups collaboratively (e.g., facilitating dialogue between two groups)	Acting "with" clients to influence the public conversation (e.g., cowriting newspaper article)
Acting "for" clients to represent them as their advocate	Acting "for" groups as their spokesperson to advocate with other systems	Acting "for" clients at the public and political levels

Adapted from Lewis et al. (2003)

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