

Special Podcast Transcript: *PCHP* Editorial Transition

Eric B. Bass, Pamela Bohrer Brown and S. Darius Tandon

Welcome to a special edition of Beyond the Manuscript. In this episode outgoing Editor-in-Chief Eric Bass, incoming Editor-in-Chief Darius Tandon, and Associate Editor Pamela Bohrer Brown discuss the genesis of the Journal, how it has fulfilled its vision for the field of CBPR, and what lies ahead for the Journal and the field.

This, like all Beyond the Manuscript podcasts will be available for download at the Journal's website <http://PCHP.press.jhu.edu>

Pamela Bohrer Brown:

Darius, when your first edition of *PCHP* was published in 2007, you and Eric presented a vision for *Progress in Community Health Partnerships*. In the article, you emphasized eight areas of scholarly activity that can promote research, education, and action in community health partnerships. What's your current vision about the types of scholarly activity that should be emphasized in *PCHP*?

Darius Tandon:

I think the categories still apply. When we published the first issue and the special article outlining the eight areas, we recognized that there was a diversity of work that needed to be published, reflecting the different types of work that's going on related to community partnerships.

So I certainly think the diversity and the eight types of articles still apply today. And I think that they speak to the different areas that partnerships are working in. In terms of moving forward, I guess there are a couple of thoughts that I have for areas that could be further emphasized.

One is around education and training. I think that there's a lot of effort right now to train investigators and to train community practitioners and community members on doing participatory research. Some of that is due to the investment that the NIH (National Institutes of Health) has made in their CTSA (Clinical and Translational Science Award) programs. So I think as we're seeing a lot of training of researchers and community members, so doing some very good, rigorous, quantitative/qualitative evaluation of this training approach, the impact of the training, would be valuable.

I also think that again, partially related to the CTSA programs that are taking place, that there's the ability for the field to do more multi-site projects. I think that one of the challenges is that we often will take a look at a single article and say, "Well, this might be idiosyncratic to a certain context, a certain location."

I think that if we can present findings on training done in multiple sites, methods that were used in multiple sites, I think that we might be able to move the field forward a little bit more.

Pamela:

We've been successful in publishing at least one or two original research articles in every issue. What types of original research would you like to see more of? And what would you like to do to encourage submission of more original research articles? I know Eric has tried to do this over the past year. What are your thoughts?

Eric Bass:

Well, let me take a crack at that one first. Actually, listening to Darius' reply to the first question, I realized that we share a lot of the same opinions about what the Journal needs to do to support the full spectrum of work that's being done, using the methods of CBPR.

Personally, I think it's really important for any peer-reviewed journal to have a strong body of original research. I see the original research as the bedrock of any strong peer-reviewed journal. As the field of CBPR continues to grow, we should expect to see increasing use of stronger study designs and/or new methods for balancing concerns about study validity with concerns about applicability or generalizability of the studies. New methods should emerge from what seem to be increasingly strong and effective partnerships with communities that are getting more and more sophisticated and empowered in their expectations for the research that can be done to meet their needs. *PCHP* has an important role in being a place for publishing the cutting-edge work that's being done by effective community partnerships.

Pamela:

I would certainly agree with that. We have published many articles in the sections for Work-in-Progress and Lessons Learned. How important is it for the Journal to continue giving so much attention to Work-in-Progress?

Darius:

Well, I think it's imperative that we continue to publish Work-in-Progress and Lessons Learned papers. There are in my mind two major reasons that it's so important. Number 1 is that researchers often are working on a long-term participatory research project where the outcomes may be two years, three years down the road. I think the ability to publish their work in progress and lessons learned from some of the formative work that they're doing and developing partnerships, piloting work, adapting interventions and so forth, I think that that gives those research teams credit.

They're able to publish in a peer-reviewed journal. I think it's demonstrating that they are moving forward with their work in a very thoughtful manner. So I think the ability to provide a space for them to publish that early work and get credit for it is very important.

Frankly, it's important for promotion and tenure processes for faculty as well. I also think that it's really important to publish the Work-in-Progress and Lessons Learned papers perhaps as much or even perhaps more so than original research articles. I think that the Work-in-Progress and the Lessons Learned articles provide a lot of very specific details and description on successes and challenges that other partnerships can learn from and implement in their work.

- Darius:* So I think that that section is really important. I do not intend to downplay the importance of original research, as I agree with Eric that original research is the bedrock of not just this Journal but other journals. And we need to emphasize that area very much so as well.
- Pamela:* That's interesting, Darius.
- Eric:* Actually, can I jump in here?
- Pamela:* Sure.
- Eric:* I'm sorry, but I guess my prerogative as the outgoing Editor is to issue a bit of a challenge for Darius. As much as I agree about the importance of the Work-in-Progress section, I think we also need to push for genuinely new lessons learned. One of the concerns we've had in reviewing the many Work-in-Progress and Lessons Learned manuscripts submitted to us is that oftentimes they're describing various lessons learned that we've heard before.
- We need to continue to push for what's unique that we're learning from this work-in-progress. As much as we want to support that preliminary work that's being done, we also want to make sure that these manuscripts are genuinely adding value and continue raising the bar for future work.
- Darius:* I completely agree with that.
- Pamela:* I think that's very important for those of us who are Associate Editors representing community groups. Because I know as we've reviewed many of the Work-in-Progress and Lessons Learned manuscripts over the year, frequently the discussion would go back to, "Well, that's not new to us. We already knew that."
- And I think it's oftentimes for the benefit of other community members, as people have commented to me, "You know, I really read that article with a lot of interest, because while what we're doing is not exactly the same, we could really identify with some of the processes and sort of use the article as a bit of a yardstick to see where we are in relation to what some other partnerships are doing."
- So I do think it's important. That leads into the other question that of course both of you know is near and dear to my heart. There have been other sections, most specifically Community Perspectives, for which we've struggled to get really valid, thoughtful articles. And we had a lot of interesting discussions. We tried to develop some different methods. What are your thoughts about the importance of these sections? What could we do to solicit more submissions?
- Eric:* Darius, do you want to take the first crack at that one?
- Darius:* Sure. I think that this is really challenging. As I was reflecting on this section, I was wondering whether we're making assumptions that community partners really want to provide input to us on the work that they're doing in partnerships.
- Are we providing appropriate guidance and an appropriate structure for community partners to be able to write about their work? We say in our instructions to authors for Community Perspectives that we're very open to different formats and different styles.

Darius:

I think that that is good, but I'm still wondering whether or not a Community Perspective actually needs to be in a written format for our Journal. We're doing a podcast right now. Maybe the approach that we need to take to getting Community Perspectives is to do a series of podcasts with community members and community practitioners.

Maybe we want community providers to provide information via some sort of online mechanism. So I think we need to think outside the box in terms of other ways, besides written form, that we might get that community perspective.

Eric:

That's interesting, Darius, because I independently was thinking that we needed to open ourselves up to new ways of getting these sort of community perspective articles. I'm particularly interested in ideas of ways that would be more interactive in terms of how these come together.

We've tried the approach of being very flexible about the format that people can submit in, but that's still hard for people that aren't accustomed to submitting things to journals. And it's been hard on our side when they do come in, and then we have to struggle through as a team to figure out, well, is this the best way to present what happened?

I'm thinking something that involves more give-and-take between the Journal team and the community authors might help us better capture that community perspective and give us something that would be really unique that I don't think any journal is doing.

I would be really excited to see something like that emerge in the next phase of the Journal.

Pamela:

I think many community members would be responsive to that kind of give-and-take, that they want to participate, but it's always been the struggle of, as you say, trying to get people to fit into a format. Then too we've received many submissions that are purported to be community perspective, and then we look, it's really the academic writing about the community perspective, but not the community voice.

So I really do think it's an ongoing challenge to look for that interactive way that the actual community voice can be heard. Because I think people do have things to say.

Eric:

Yes. I think we probably all agree that what we really want is to capture the community voice.

Pamela:

Yes.

Eric:

And that's going to require some new strategies for doing that.

Pamela:

Absolutely! I certainly hope that anyone that hears this will be more than willing to send in some ideas because even from our partners here in Baltimore, I know people have lots of interesting things to say. We just haven't quite found the way to give them that voice yet.

So Eric, as the outgoing Editor, what have we done best that you would like to see preserved? And then Darius, could you tell us what you would like to preserve in your tenure as editor?

Eric:

Sure. Well, I must say it's a tough question to answer after the six to seven years we've spent in bringing the Journal this far. I suppose what I'm most proud of is that we really took the time to build the Journal on a foundation that engaged community members in the work of the Journal. And the fact that we reached out to community members like yourself at a very early stage. And as we were conceptualizing our approach to the Journal, that we included community members as Associate Editors who were involved in the real work of the Journal, discussing every manuscript, giving input into the decisions.

Also that we included community members on our external Editorial Board to help give direction to the overall Journal initiative. And that we sought input from other community members in the peer review process. In my opinion, this engagement of community members in the work of the Journal is one of the most unique aspects of the Journal, to which I attribute much of the credit for our success in making the Journal the number one place for publishing CBPR.

Darius:

Again, independently, I jotted that down as something that I think we really did well and are continuing to do well in terms of incorporating community input throughout the editorial process. I can think of a couple other things that I would like to make sure that we preserve.

One is what we're doing right now, the podcast. Usually, the podcast is entitled Beyond the Manuscript, where it's an opportunity for one academic partner—at least one academic partner—and at least one community partner to go “beyond” the manuscript and talk about things that they weren't able to put into their 3,000 or 3,500-word article.

I think that's really important for this multi-faceted lengthy partnership work that all of us are engaged in to be able to comment on issues that maybe don't quite fit into the structure of an article. I definitely think that is important for us to preserve.

The other thing is the dissemination of articles that are published in our Journal. I think that the challenge that every journal has is to make sure that the information that is published is being accessed and used.

We have very intentionally asked authors to provide us a list of individuals that they would like their articles sent to so that those individuals, whether they're researchers or community practitioners or community members, can hear about the work that's being published.

We've received some very positive feedback about that, both from authors as well as folks that are receiving the articles that are published. So I definitely see that as important.

Pamela:

What does *PCHP* need to do differently to continue to serve the ever growing market of community health partnerships?

Eric:

I guess the first thing that I would say is I think we have to be careful not to be complacent that we are giving enough voice to community members in the work of the Journal.

Eric:

I think that will require that we continue to recruit new community members to be part of the Journal's work and that we engage them in all parts of the work, and make sure that we're listening to the suggestions that come. That may push us in new directions.

I think at this stage in the Journal's life, it could be tempting just to fall into the traditional mode of running a peer-reviewed journal. That would be a mistake if we let that happen. I suppose the other thing is the Journal should continue to push for ways to maximize the impact of the work that's being published in the Journal along the lines of what Darius was suggesting just a minute ago.

That may require that we continue to brainstorm new ways of doing that, to take advantage of current communication technology and the ways that people learn about work and put it to use.

Darius:

I second what Eric said. I think the way that I'm thinking about this issue about moving our work forward is to ask the question, what's going to be most useful to the array of folks doing partnership research that are accessing our Journal?

Right now, we do have some things that go beyond a traditional research article format. We have Community Policy Briefs for certain types of articles. We have *Beyond the Manuscript* podcasts. But I wonder whether there are other things that we could be doing that would highlight the work of partnership research.

So, for example, could we do a series of briefs related to a topic that's relevant to partnership research? The briefs could be related to ethics, or to sustainability, where we would have 500-word or 1,000-word commentaries from a series of authors, that would be both academic and community partners.

Could we actually do something where we would invite different voices from the field to do a podcast with us, talking about their vision for the work of community partnerships? So I think that there are different things that the readership of a journal will respond to. Echoing what Eric said, I think that it's imperative that we're constantly taking the temperature of these audiences to make sure that what we're providing is actually going to be beneficial for the work that they're trying to do.

Pamela:

Exactly! I think that continuing feedback from community members is actually very gratifying. When I was inviting reviewers for an article the other night, I was delighted to see the growing number of community representatives that we have in the list of reviewers. So people are paying attention and wanting to participate. We should continue to develop that and reach out to new people, and I think that will certainly continue to enrich the Journal.