

APPENDIX D

Empowerment and Family Supports¹

Moncrieff Cochran
Cornell University

Introduction

Thank you very much. It is indeed a special pleasure to be out here in Victoria again, a city and a part of the world that I am in grave danger of falling in love with.

I am here to talk with you about empowerment through family support. What is family support? Gail Christopher, Director of the national Family Resource Coalition in the U.S., has recently written that "family support programs adhere to the following principles: 1) a focus on prevention and recognition of the importance of the early years of life; 2) an ecological approach to service delivery; 3) a developmental view of parents; and 4) the universal value of support." She goes on to say

"Prevention here means capacity building and empowerment of families. Early years are emphasized because of their profound impact on human development throughout life. An ecological approach translates into respect for local communities and the diverse cultural experiences they reflect. A developmental view means an appreciation for the multi-dimensional roles and ongoing needs of parents, in light of their innate capacities and potential. And finally, our emphasis on the universal value of support reflects a non-judgmental belief that all families need support at some time. This [universal emphasis] generates fewer stigmas ..."

Christopher says that family support programs are about prevention, and that a part of prevention involves the empowerment of families. But what is

¹ Speech given to the Mayor's Task Force on Children and Families, Victoria, British Columbia, October 15, 1990.

empowerment? As one way of answering that question, I want first to provide brief descriptions of three grass-roots activities that we at Cornell believe contain elements of the empowerment process.

1st Example

Escuelita Alegre preschool was established in a New Mexico neighborhood defined by drug dependency, racial tension, unemployment and violence. The preschool is supported by heavy parent involvement, home visits, and parent group meetings.

Although the preschool provides the program's nucleus, the process of empowerment is most evident in the group meetings. All parents of Escuelita Alegre children belong to the parent organization. In formal meetings, these parents guide content and policy for the preschool, and provide one another with a support group for the empowerment process. These meetings also establish the framework guiding staff in provision of services. After parents decide on outcomes, staff assists them in developing activities that will address the parents' expectations.

Statistical tests show that children at Escuelita Alegre are doing better than those at an academically similar program without parent involvement. Changes in parents are very obvious. At the beginning of the school year, most new parents are timid and passive. By the end of the school year, it is the staff who ask the parents for permission to speak. Parents have developed their own agendas, and initiate and carry out their own tasks. They create and circulate the project newsletter, and assume the critical role of decision-making. Clearly these parents are working to gain access to those structures of power, influence and finance that are essential factors in getting anything accomplished in this modern world. (Chavez, 1989)

2nd example

A professor in Southern California decides to evaluate the efforts of California schools to work with the parents of Mexican-American children. In the process of documenting teachers' beliefs about parents, and parents' beliefs about teachers, she discovers that the parents do not have the information they need to organize for change in the schools. Of Mexican-American heritage herself, this professor decides to channel the necessary information to key parents, knowing that this "violates" the principle of objective, external observer-evaluator. She facilitates organization of an Hispanic parents group, which in turn negotiates key changes in school policy. The professor documents her involvement with the parents, their actions, and the policy changes as an integral part of the evaluation study. (Delgado-Gaitan, 1989)

3rd example

Professors at an eastern land-grant university are interested in better understanding parental stresses and supports. They design a family support program to build on family strengths, and counter the prevailing deficit model of family support. Home visits to parents with three year olds begin with the question: what kinds of things are you already doing with your child, that you think are important for the child? Neighborhood cluster group meetings are organized around parents' agendas for change in their neighborhoods. Parents determine their own levels of involvement, and select the types of activities they will participate in. After two years of participation, children in the families are doing better in 1st grade than children from similar backgrounds in a comparison group. This difference is strongest for children with the least educated parents. Parents' perceptions of themselves as parents are higher and their social networks have grown more in the program than in the comparison group, especially if they are single parents. Changes also occurred at the neighborhood level; playgrounds cleaned up, a dangerous creek fenced off, and several family resource centers created. Para-professionals working in the program began to think of the process they were helping to shape as the empowerment process. (Cochran, 1987)

What do these three examples have in common, which we might extract in order to define empowerment? First, they all involve a process that has certain characteristics. A parent organization guiding policy and providing a support group. Reflective observation by a trained evaluator, followed by new information leading to a parent organization that negotiated changes in school policy. Home visits and neighborhood cluster meetings through which parents reflected on their own worth, discussed problems, considered alternatives, and took various kinds of actions related to neighborhood and school. While there were important outcomes, which provided the rationale for these processes, it is the process itself that we need to understand better, if the outcomes are of value to us.

Second, there is what I would call "mutual respect" at the heart of each of these examples, and that mutuality is generated by giving power to people who, for one reason or another, have experienced very little control over

their lives. Parents guide policy at Escuelita Alegre by deciding together what outcomes they want to see in their children. The evaluator in southern California gives up her outsider role to provide information that puts parents in a position to negotiate with the school. Parents in New York define the parent-child activities that are of special value for their children, and establish goals for change in the neighborhood. This is respect, which generates respect in return.

A third common element in these examples is what Paulo Friere and others call critical reflection. In the parent organization at Escuelita Alegre participants are constantly examining the present situation, comparing it with the past, and using those thoughts to plan for the future. The evaluator in California described her observations about parent and teacher attitudes to both the parents and the teachers, which caused the parents to reflect critically on their own attitudes. That critical analysis led to constructive action. In New York parents used cluster groups to critically examine their neighborhoods as places in which to raise young children, and that thinking led to courses of action. Friere says of critical reflection,

Groups take their own daily lives as objects of their reflection.... They are required to stand at a distance from the daily lives in which they are generally immersed and to which they often attribute an aura of permanence. Only at a distance can they get a perspective that permits them to emerge from that daily routine and begin their own independent development. (Freire, 1978)

One other common theme that runs through these examples is what we might call "caring". In every instance people reached out to others, not only to exercise their rights, but also because they came to know each other in ways that led them to be friends; to care for one another. Carol Gilligan, in her book In a Different Voice, distinguishes two major dimensions in moral development, which she calls the ethic of rights and the ethic of caring. Over

time, the ways people interacted in the examples I gave, and the decisions they made, placed as high a value on caring as they did on obtaining their rights as parents and as community members.

Here, then, is an evolving definition of the empowerment process, built from the examples I have been talking about and experiences coming from a number of other grass-roots programs.

Empowerment is an intentional, ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources.

Let me say a bit more about elements of this definition, starting toward the end, where I refer to people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources. This is the overarching purpose behind the empowerment process. The empowerment process is made necessary by the existence of serious inequalities in the distribution of resources at the societal level. Our definition of empowerment explicitly acknowledges the oppression these inequities have created by identifying those with fewer resources, and recognizing the central role that these marginalized people themselves must play in reducing these inequities. If you believe that there are no inequities in Canadian society that deserve to be corrected, then you will not be able to give wholehearted support to empowerment processes.

Do I need to convince you that Canadian society contains inequities that are morally wrong and economically expensive? If You were a U.S. audience I would trot out some facts like these:

Income inequality hit record levels in the United States between 1979-88. Median adjusted income for the bottom two-fifths of all families fell 2%, while for the top two-fifths it rose 10%.

During the same period, the real income of U.S. families with a family head under age 25 dropped by 43%, despite a 16% increase in the number of working mothers.

The U.S. minimum wage, in real terms, has declined 33% since 1981. In 1988 a full-time minimum wage worker with two children earned \$2,500 less than the poverty level.

The U.S. has a much higher percentage of children in poverty than either Western Europe or Canada. In 1987 one out of five children lived in poverty -- a 24% increase over 1979.

Three out of five poor children in the U.S. are white.

These are the kinds of realities I'd talk about if I was speaking to a U.S. audience. Maybe there is more equity in Canada.

Now you may be sitting there thinking "This empowerment stuff doesn't have anything to do with most Canadian families, because most of our people don't live in poverty. Let me nip that thought in the bud, by pointing out that compared to parents in European countries, all parents in both Canada and the United States are marginalized. In terms of resource allocation, parents in European countries get a much larger slice of the pie than is the case here. In a very real sense, all parents in North America are disadvantaged, and so deserve to participate in the empowerment process.

Notice from the definition that we refer to the empowerment process as centered in the local community. Here we are attempting to locate the primary sources of energy propelling the empowerment process. By selecting the local community we are maintaining that the generative energies do not come primarily from the state or regional government, or primarily from individuals, families or personal networks. As we see it, individuals,

families and networks make up the reservoir from which the empowerment process draws its energy, but this potential is mobilized, as my earlier examples illustrate, by interactions taking place at the local community level.

Facilitation of the empowerment process can be greatly enhanced at the regional or national level by the removal of barriers or the provision of incentives, and at the individual level by the building of self esteem and self confidence. But the processes through which control over resources actually shifts in favor of less advantaged groups take place in the local community. This the distinction that I see between enablement and empowerment. Individuals are enabled in one on one situations, like counseling and home visiting. Community groups may be enabled by incentives provided by the state. But empowerment is the process going on in the local community, where the mutual respect, critical reflection, group participation, and caring actually occur. Enablement can contribute to the empowerment process, but it is not the same as that process.

A few more words about mutual respect. This concept embodies a key set of beliefs and assumptions that must become a foundation for the actions of all participants if the empowerment process is to succeed. These include

- The belief that all people have strengths
- The assumption that diversity (race, gender, family form, age, sexual preference) is positively valued
- The belief that people without power have as much capacity as the powerful to assess their own needs
- The belief that relations between groups in the local community should be organized to provide an equal balance of power

and

- The assumption that the people disadvantaged by the way that society is currently structured must play the primary role in developing the strategies by which they gain increased control over valued resources.

This proposed set of basic beliefs and assumptions should not be simply accepted without discussion and debate. It should be the basis of a critical reflection process by all participants, only out of which can come growth in mutual respect.

Finally, you see that group participation is made explicit to underscore our belief that the empowerment process is more than one to one dyadic interaction. An essential part of the process is the positive validation, by others in the group living in similar circumstances, of feelings, ideas and beliefs negatively experienced by the isolated individual. Other important potentials in group participation include the expanded knowledge base that comes from involving more people, and the greater action potential produced by mutual support.

So far I have spent time defining the empowerment process. What I want to do now is to focus in on the belief that all people have strengths. This was the first of the beliefs that I mentioned earlier as the basis for mutual respect, and you remember that mutual respect was a key element in my definition of the empowerment process.

Why is it important to develop programs on the assumption that all people have strengths? I have three answers to that question. Maybe you can think of others. First, psychology has shown us that people respond much better to positive recognition and reinforcement than they do to negative reinforcement and punishment. The second reason to build on strengths is that programs focussed on deficits haven't worked. This is partly because they operate after the fact; they are not preventive. The problem is that we are so used to focussing programs on problem behavior that we have even brought this mind set into the preventive arena.

This brings me to the third, and perhaps most important reason why it's essential to focus on strengths in family support programs: because parents will avoid programs that, however subtly, send the message that they are sick, and need to be cured. I am one of those who maintains that in the U.S. we have spent the past 100 years developing a human service system that is responsive only to failure in people. As I see it, this system is basically punitive in its orientation because the people it works with are seen as rejects and misfits, who don't deserve respect and positive support.

Where have these attitudes come from? What is this deficit perspective? The deficit perspective is an orientation toward community support for family life based on the idea that the isolated nuclear family must be fully responsible for the support and nurturance of its members. The most basic belief is that each family is a competitor in our free enterprise economic system, and as such should be able to bring in enough money to buy the necessary "preventive" services in the market-place; food, housing, clothing, medical care, transportation, education beyond high school, and so forth. The logical conclusion following from this belief is that when families are unable to purchase the needed resources, it is they who have failed - they have lost the competition (Grubb & Lazerson, 1982). William Ryan called this blaming the victim; you create an economic system that requires unemployment, minimal fringe benefits and a low minimum wage to generate large profit, and then you blame those who cannot support their children, and the children themselves, for giving in to forces over which they have little or no control (Ryan, 1971).

This combination of beliefs, or assumptions, has led to what some of us are now calling the "deficit model" of intervention, in which the "client"

must demonstrate inadequacy before being defined as "eligible" for assistance. Major examples of such assistance programs in the United States have been Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Food Stamps, and most job training programs. In these programs you must be "means tested" for eligibility, thereby showing conclusive evidence that you cannot support your family before assistance can be made available. Public day care subsidies, where they have been available at all, have usually been treated as "protective" services, and so require that a child be abused or neglected before a family can qualify.

The final irony is that this whole system of beliefs requires, as part of the free enterprise system, that human services be designed "to move families toward independence, and away from public support or assistance". We require parents and others to become totally dependent, through demonstrated inadequacy, in order to become eligible for services designed to make them independent and self-supporting.

To me this deficit approach is pure folly, and that conviction is based in part on the wide array of positive, supportive, prevention programs for families in Western European countries, and the dramatically lower incidences of child mortality, family violence, and youth delinquency found in those countries.

Is it possible to identify strengths in families, and imagine community-level programs and processes that might build on those strengths? I'd like to turn now to a case study that illustrates this approach. Before doing so, however, I want to end this discussion of strengths, and building on potentialities rather than deficits, by emphasizing one thing. Right now some of you may be thinking, "I know someone who doesn't have any strengths!" That is not the point. The point is that we have to believe that the strengths and

potentials are there, and program as if they were there, in order to create and environment in which they can be released.

A Case Study: Accomplishments and Limitations

Earlier I spent time explaining to you what we at Cornell mean by the empowerment process, and then we spent some time considering the idea of building on the strengths and potentialities of people and groups, rather than focusing on their deficits. Let me turn now to a case study that illustrates both accomplishments and limitations in a program designed to support families in empowering ways.

Ten years ago Urie Bronfenbrenner, William Cross, Jr. and I set out, with the help of 276 Syracuse, NY families, to learn more about family stresses and supports (Cochran & Henderson, 1985; Cochran, 1988). We delivered a modest program of supports for families - called Family Matters - to 160 of those families. Parents could receive home visitors, they could join other parents in neighborhood support clusters, they could chose both options or they could decide not to become actively involved at all. The families were a cross-section of the Syracuse population, with incomes ranging from \$5,000 to \$50,000 a year. About a third of the families were African-American, and 30% contained a single parent.

This program continued for about three years, until the three-year-old in each of those families had started first grade. At program's end what had begun as an effort to better understand parental stresses and supports was being referred to as empowerment.

What did we really mean at that time - eight years ago - by empowerment? At the conclusion of the Family Matters program in Syracuse we had a number of strong "hunches" about the concept, based on 30 plus monchs of observation,

discussion and community action. First, there was a sense that empowerment was a process rather than an end state. Parents didn't "achieve empowerment"; rather they changed over time in what appeared to be systematic ways. Second, there was qualitative evidence of what seemed to be steps in this process of change. The initial step seemed to involve change in the perception of self; some of the mothers who viewed themselves quite negatively when first visited showed signs over time of beginning to believe in and care for themselves. Something positive was happening at the level of the individual will, or spirit.

A second step seemed to involve relationships with others; new efforts to reach out to spouse and child, and also to relatives, neighbors and friends outside the family. A later step involved social action on behalf of the child. A number of neighborhood groups were formed around plans for neighborhood improvement, and some parents got involved with the schools their first graders were attending. Thus there appeared to be several different outcomes of the empowerment process, beginning with an individual's view of herself and progressing through relations with nearby others to interactions with more distant organizations and institutions.

How was this family supports program different than what had come before?

The beliefs underlying this empowerment approach were sharply different from those dominating the human services arena. First, as I have already mentioned, we assumed that all families have strengths - not just two parent families, or black families, or middle class families, but all families. That is a radical assumption, from the deficit perspective. Second, we assumed that much of the most useful knowledge about the rearing of children can be found in the community itself -- in the older generations, in social networks,

and in ethnic and cultural traditions -- rather than in the heads or books of college professors and other so-called experts. Other assumptions emphasized the legitimacy of a variety of different family forms, the importance of fathers as participants in the parenting process, and the special value in cultural differences. These assumptions were the bedrock upon which the empowerment process was built, and were expressed in everything that home visitors and neighborhood workers did with families.

What did those workers actually do? Here it is useful to think in terms of a number of different ecological levels. The goal of our family support program was to have a positive impact on families at each of those levels. So it was the home visitors who brought empowerment assumptions right into the household. Their approach involved an emphasis on asking parents to identify activities already being done with their children, that they - the parents - believed were especially important for development. Such activity ideas were written down, checked with the parents for accuracy, and then - with parental permission - shared with other parents. The effect seemed to be to build in parents a feeling of their own value. Of course, the home visitors did other things with parents as well - lots of listening, informal counseling and referral - but the emphasis was always on helping parents appreciate their own importance to the lives of their children. By affirming their value we were appealing to their internal spiritual resources; their will-power.

At the next ecological level - the social network - we were encouraging families to join together in the neighborhood to get to know each other, share impressions of family life in that neighborhood, and (if need be) develop and carry out a plan for change. The idea was to facilitate the exchange of informal resources like babysitting, childrearing advice and emotional

support, and create an action arena if the need for changes was felt. One lesson learned was that in low income neighborhoods parents are not interested in neighboring in the absence of some prior trust-building process. Fear of crime and of the unknown translated into negative feelings about the neighbors. About half of the parents in those neighborhoods wouldn't respond to invitations to local cluster meetings until they had spent several months with a home visitor they trusted, who made them feel that they had something to contribute to such neighborhood gatherings.

Still more distant from the immediate family than network members are representatives of the institutions in the community affecting both parent and child; teachers and other staff at the school, the boss and others at the workplace, the police, and staff at the local welfare office. Our particular interest was on the child's transition from home to school, so the family workers developed a series of activities for the parents designed to build both confidence and skills specific to active involvement with the child's school and teacher. Parents role-played parent-teacher conferences, visited elementary school classrooms, invited teachers into their cluster groups for discussions about school, and made a special effort to understand the schooling choices created by the recent school desegregation plan. Again, the emphasis was on parents as the most important adults in the lives of their children. We wanted to give parents the confidence to take responsible action on behalf of themselves and their children, by building trust through home visiting, mutual support through informal network ties, and special skills related to having influence in the school setting.

Ultimately everything done had to reflect what our believed about human beings; that in an atmosphere of trust and support they would respond more

constructively to recognition of their strengths than of their deficits. A special effort was undertaken to make those values very explicit in our program. Positive value was placed on both individual initiative and mutual support, on parenting as a role for both men and women, on diversity of cultural, racial and religious background and family structure, on children as active, growing human beings, and on the right of parents to play an active role in the schooling of their children. The importance of publicizing and constantly re-emphasizing these values cannot be overemphasized; they set the tone for everything else that happened.

When the time came to evaluate the effects of the empowerment program it was carried out with the emergent empowerment process in mind. Both prior to and after the program we gathered a lot of information from families, both in the program and in a comparison group, about parental perceptions of self, parent-child activities, social network ties, parent-teacher contacts and the child's performance in first grade. These data were used to test our qualitative impressions of program impact in a pre-post comparison evaluation design. The results provided solid support for our earlier hunches, and extended the documentation beyond the parent to the child (Cochran & Henderson, 1985). These results indicated, first, that mothers' perceptions of themselves as parents had become more positive. This was especially the case for White, single mothers. Second, the program caused constructive changes in mothers' social networks. Again the findings indicate that single mothers were especially responsive in network terms to program involvement.

We also compared childrens' performance in first grade, using measures of personal adjustment, interpersonal peer relations, relationship to teacher, cognitive motivation, and average report card score. Analyses of these data

indicated that involvement with the program did indeed have a positive impact upon childrens' school performance, but that this impact was limited to certain kinds of families. A direct, positive impact was found for the children of married couples, when those parents had a high school education or less. There was also a positive impact for the children with only one parent living at home, but only when accompanied by other changes; increases in nonkin at the primary network level, higher perceptions of self as parent (Whites), and joint parent-child activities involving household chores (Blacks). Thus a feature common to all of the subgroups for which positive school effects were found was those families' relatively less advantageous position in the social structure.

Accomplishments and limitations - This has been an overview of what we did in our family support program, and some assessment of impacts. But how successful were we from the perspective on the empowerment process that we have developed 8 years later, and that I described to you earlier? Let's go back to the definition.

Empowerment is an intentional, ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources.

Intentional - Certainly the Family Matters program was intentional, albeit more for research than for public policy purposes. For that reason, while ongoing for three years, no attempt was made to carry the program beyond the completion of the research program.

Process - One of our great strengths was the focus on processes, the

emphasis on which was the basis of the research plan.

Centered... - Activities were certainly centered in the local community, and more specifically in ten geographically defined neighborhoods.

Mutual respect - Mutual respect was at the heart of our approach, with parents defining their own needs, selecting among several different kinds of participation, and guiding action goals in the local neighborhoods. Emphasis was placed on parents as the most important adults in the lives of their children, and on program workers as knowledgeable "enablers" available to provide advice, make referrals, and facilitate group process and participation.

Critical reflection - Critical reflection was an element in program processes achieved only sometimes, and then with only an intuitive understanding of its importance. Parents participating in neighborhood clusters did examine their current parenting circumstances together, identify some action areas, and take some action in concert. But we made no systematic effort to regularize this reflection process in those groups, and many parents did not participate in clusters. So critical reflection was not clearly articulated as a goal, and occurred only sporadically.

Caring - Along the caring dimension we were more successful, but again at an intuitive rather than as a goal a publicly espoused and systematically pursued.

Group participation - Group participation, while clearly articulated from the beginning, involved fewer families than it would have if we had understood from the beginning the need to build trust through one on one interaction before attempting to bring parents to group experiences, especially in low-income neighborhoods.

Access to and control over resources - It is here that I think our efforts in Family Matters really fell short of their potential. In our case, resources involved the schools program children were attending, as well as the neighborhoods families were living in. We were even less successful at involving the schools in the empowerment process than we had been with local neighborhoods. Part of the problem involved values and expectations: home-school contact was associated with problems, and so neither the parents nor the schools were willing to initiate contact until the child was having difficulty. Program workers did not become directly involved with the schools in an effort to facilitate preventive home-school partnerships. We discussed and began preparation for that more proactive strategy, but interestingly, the idea was vetoed by one of our funding sources, the National Institute of Education (!). So our failure to more actively engage with a key institution - the school - controlling resources of great value to all our parents was a real limitation of our family support program.

Let me mention that more recently our group at Cornell has developed, implemented and evaluated the impacts of a program called Cooperative Communications between Home and School program, designed to build home-school partnerships through inservice training for teachers, skills-building workshops for parents, and consultation with school administrators. Our findings indicate that the program had a wide range of effects. Parents became more positive toward school involvement, began to perceive the school as a caring community, acquired new information about the school, and developed or improved skills in talking about the child's learning, dealing with school-related problems, and empathizing with teachers. Teachers learned the importance of finding and reporting the positive aspects of children, and

lessening parental feelings of inadequacy and intimidation. They learned new ways to involve parents, and how to initiate more frequent communication. Equally importantly, school policies were changed. More resources were allocated to family-related staff development, and administrators developed a better understanding of the pay-offs for helping teachers involve parents. Schools changed the times during which parent-teacher conferences were scheduled, to better meet the needs of working parents, and provided baby-sitting during those conference times. In a few instances teachers or even principals began to make home visits.

I have covered a lot of ground this evening. Before closing I want to touch very quickly on two other emerging issues in the empowerment arena, as final food for thought.

The Transforming Role

What is the role of the helper in the empowerment process? We have begun to refer to this as the transforming role. The transforming role is the part played by any one of us in helping to make the empowerment process possible. It is a facilitating role.

What are some of the competencies involved in such a role? The following is a list, not comprehensive, of what I see as some of those competencies. I hope you can think of others.

- respect for diverse perspectives.
- capacity to listen and reflect.
- ability to subordinate own ego; to put oneself aside.
- skill and creativity in helping people become more aware of and confident in their own abilities.
- appreciation for when to step back, and help individual or group assume decision-making and action.

- ability to analyze power relations, and help others to do such analysis.
- knowledge about how to gain access to information.
- ability to reflect on and criticize ongoing process, including own role in that process.

If we are committed to fostering the empowerment process, then it is critically important to emphasize development of these competencies in the programs that train human service workers, and to consider the extent to which current conceptions of the "professional" role contribute to or interfere with the development of these skills.

Evaluation as Critical Reflection

We all know that evaluation is important. Some of you may have also experienced the ways that evaluation can get in the way of effective programming, and even drive that programming in directions that don't address the needs of the consumer. Another emergent issue in the empowerment arena has to do with how evaluation can be used to facilitate the empowerment process. There isn't enough time this evening to spell out the possibilities fully, but let me just touch on a couple of points.

First, we can look at the definition of the empowerment process again for help in shaping an empowering evaluation. According to that definition, any evaluation should be respectful of participants, and especially the parents and children using the program. To respect means more than not to insult. It means to involve the consumer in deciding what to evaluate, how to do it, and how to interpret the results.

The evaluation should be caring, not callous. In one of the examples I opened with this morning an evaluator decided to share information with parents about how to make change, even though she knew that such action would

take her out of the traditional evaluator's role, because she cared. She empathized with the parents' hopes and aspirations, and wanted to contribute to, rather than dispassionately observe, their efforts to involve themselves with their children's schools.

Finally, and I believe most importantly, evaluation should be critical reflection, and critical reflection evaluation. When parents or other service consumers have the opportunity to stop what they are doing, assess where they have been, examine their goals, and figure out how to take the next steps, that is evaluation of the most important kind - from an empowerment perspective. We need to make those opportunities available to human service consumers, help ensure that resources are available to allow parents to get to where they decide that they want to go, and document that process. Put that documentation together over time and you've got the most useful assessment of all, a running description of what was and wasn't working, and what was done to make course corrections, and to generate energy for more change. In this way evaluation can become the empowerment process, and the empowerment process evaluation.

My purpose this evening has been to articulate an alternative to the deficit model of family services, an alternative we call the empowerment process. Is it asking too much that local municipalities like the city of Victoria actively facilitate some redistribution of resources in support of its most marginalized members? Is it unrealistic to expect cities and provinces to design and implement policies and practices that better enable the performance of transforming roles? Perhaps. But when I begin to think that way, I remind myself of a quote used by one of my heroes, Marian Wright Edelman, the founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund. Edelman

and her book, entitled Families in Peril: An Agenda for Social Change, with the following quote about goals, by Dr. Benjamin Mays, former president of Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia:

"It must be born in mind that the tragedy of life doesn't lie in not reaching your goal. The tragedy lies in having no goal to reach. It isn't a calamity to die with dreams unfulfilled, but it is a calamity not to dream. It is not a disaster to be unable to capture your ideal, but it is a disaster to have no ideal to capture. It is not a disgrace not to reach the stars, but it is a disgrace to have no stars to reach for. Not failure, but low aim, is sin."

Thank you for listening!