

Putting Policy in its Place through Cultural Discourse Analysis

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A key problem confronting service agencies of all kinds today is bridging a potential gap between the agency's ways of operating, and a local community – and its ways of operating - that the agency serves. This gap may appear when an environmental agency serves a local community, when family services are provided, when health practitioners serve specific communities, when governments address citizens' problems, NGOs address local affairs, international bodies address various needs for food or security, when municipalities address land-use controversies, and so on. Each participant in this type of process, in one way or another, would benefit from being sensitive to the potential of a gap between the providers and recipients of services. If reflectively scrutinized, each can help the other by developing ways of bridging the potential divide between an agency and a local community, or between the agency and various local communities in need of, or desiring their service.

Policy is often designed, however, precisely not to understand, but to stand over these gaps, for policy is by definition, typically, an abstract statement for generic actions above various local circumstances. As a result, policy can become blind to these gaps. This paper addresses problems that arise in this process at two levels, in the gaps between agencies and local communities, and in policies which stand too far above particular peoples and places. It begins by introducing three general problems, by introducing a research methodology designed to address those problems, by reviewing research which employs this methodology, by detailing an exemplary global project, and by discussing some of the implications of this general research program as it is being done by an international network of scholars.

Potential Problems between Agencies and Local Communities: Concepts, Conduct, and Cooperative Action

The potential problems confronted in these gap-making processes are many, and multiply quickly when the scale of efforts is enlarged. Here I will

focus on only three very general kinds of problems. The three involve potential gaps in concepts, conduct, and cooperative action. I will return in the end to discuss briefly issues of policy, and how the approach discussed below may help particularize policy procedures.

The first problem has to do with concepts, premises, symbols, or terms people use to think and speak. More specifically, what I draw attention to are potential differences in peoples' conceptions of what is in the world, or what is being worked on, addressed, or redressed in specific situations. Differences as these can create gaps between a local community's ideas about itself, and the agency's conception of itself, its service, purposes, or products. As a result, we discover that basic definitions, concepts, premises, assumptions pertaining to ways of living generally, or more specifically to a particular social situation, service or product may not be widely shared by both. While a shared problem may be agreed upon, for example "too much violence," what violence indeed is, how it is done, for what reasons, and so on may not be held in common, or local conceptions about such things may not even be publicly available to an agency. As another example, a health agency may have its own sense of "health," "disease," "diagnosis," and "treatment," which may be unlike that of a local community's (e.g., Duchan and Kovarsky, 2005). Similarly, a legal service, as well as a local community, may have its own sense of a "violation" as well as its "defense," the differences of each creating gaps between service providers and local members of a community (e.g., Carbaugh and Wolf, 1999; Liberman, 1990). Gaps in understanding as these must somehow be understood and bridged, if people are to work more effectively, or cooperatively together. A similar set of problems could be described regarding differences in the conceptions of "democracy," "proper care of children" for a social agency, "security" for Homeland Security or the United Nations, and so on, some of which we will get to in what follows (see e.g., Naess, 1951; Miller and Rudnick, 2008).

To clarify this initial point, it is crucial to emphasize that this potential problem in understanding is complex, for it is located between conceptions which are grounded within two social sites, typically through different discourses. One is the local community's and its understandings. Typically, this local distinctiveness has been widely recognized as for example means of reducing teen pregnancy must be designed with some knowledge of a local community and its views of teen sexual activity. But the point is realized only as this site is considered relative to, and as different from another, the providing agency's. A reflective eye must be turned also to the agency's conceptions of the service, including, for example, its ideas about "pregnancy," "teens," "sex," and "contraception" for example. Without locating this problem as one between both sites' discourses - the agency's and the local community's - we risk running the one over the other. And more often than we might like to admit, this imposition of the one over the other is indeed what is happening.

A second type of problem is a particular part of the first. It has to do with what is deemed good practice, proper conduct, or best as practical action. Every human group has its own ways of doing things, its own ways of doing things properly, and of what is improper. The point applies again not only to local communities, but also to institutions and agencies. A problem can occur when there is a gap in the expectations for proper conduct, one group violating the other's sense of the good. Easy examples have to do with ways of identifying what indeed is a problem, ways of diagnosing "it" as such, then in ways of treating that problem. The same point applies not only to biological problems, but to social and cultural ones as well.

Agencies are notorious for developing deep histories which corroborate their sense of the world, of what is wrong with it, and how it can be made better. These are often virtuous and well-intentioned. A potential problem occurs as the agency's rather robust premises and practices confront a local community's which differs from it. One can forge forward with one's own mind about the matters, but one could also stop and reflect upon the other's sense of proper action (and also one's own). It is this problem, a failure to develop the capacity to reflect not only on one's own but other's ways of going about things, and doing them properly, which I draw

attention to here, and which we seek to address in the works reviewed below.

Finally, given the above possibilities of gaps between group's conceptions and conduct, between premises and practices, it is little surprise that here are problems in designing cooperative actions between agencies and local communities. It is not a simple matter how to work with those who conceive of things differently, or conduct their affairs differently. Procedures for such design will necessarily vary by community and agency, and this is a reason such practices have been difficult to develop, just as good policy statements are most difficult to create.

These three problems in concepts, conduct, and cooperative action must be addressed in ways which bring into view, reflect upon, and productively engage both the agency's ideas, and those of local communities. Cultural discourse analysis provides a way of doing this.

Cultural Discourse Analysis as a Way of Addressing these Problems

The approach advanced here is a version of the ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1972; Carbaugh, 2008). As such it is committed to understanding human groups as formed through their ways of speaking, their ways of structuring communication conduct, their ways of creating particular discursive dynamics. The idea is that people, in agencies or local communities, are involved in cultural forms of communication, or distinctive discourses, and these both presume, and create their taken-for-granted concepts about, and conduct of social life. Recent developments in the ethnography of communication have understood this dynamic as involving generic forms of cultural communication such as rituals, myths, and social dramas (Philipsen, 1987, 2002), as enacting communication codes (Philipsen, 1997; Carbaugh, 2005), with these forms and codes immanent in the socially situated practice of cultural discourses (Carbaugh, Milburn, and Gibson, 1997; Carbaugh, 1988, 2007).

The idea of a cultural discourse is, as a result, a complicated one; it is a large construct which brings into view historically transmitted systems of expression, key cultural terms, cultural forms or sequences, practical norms or rules for conduct, and

the conventionally codified meanings participants associate with the use of this expressive system, this system of terms, sequences, and rules. The meanings in cultural discourses are understood to grandly and creatively structure how people understand being a person, how the person as such is related to others, forms for proper action or organization, ways of feeling, and how to dwell in places (Carbaugh, 2005, 2007). Analyzing communication with this range of features in mind is demanding, for it involves a variety of investigative procedures. In addition to theorizing communication as cultural discourses, the modes of inquiry are several: descriptive analyses of specific communication practices, interpretive analyses of the meanings of those practices to participants, comparative analyses of communication practices in different communities, and possibly critical analyses which assess the practice from the ethical stances participants bring to their social lives. These investigative procedures will not be discussed further here, but are presented in more detail elsewhere (Carbaugh, 2005, 2007).

What will be presented next is a review of literature in which ethnographic studies of communication have helped address the problems discussed above thereby providing knowledge which helps bridge the gaps between different human communities. Each study was conducted by a scholar in the tradition of the ethnography of communication generally, and cultural discourse analysis specifically; each completed a dissertation at the Department of Communication at the University of Massachusetts or is in the process of doing so.¹

Ethnography as Building Bases for Cooperative Actions

Ethnographic studies of communication have provided ways of understanding people in diverse communities, and as a result should be of some use in productively engaging dynamics between different speech communities. In terms of the above discussion, such studies should be helpful in bridging gaps, for example, between human agencies and local communities. In what follows, I will review four types of studies which will prove instructive for the tasks outlined above. All involve the study of the relationship between discursive systems, with several exploring the relationship between an agency's discourse and another one active in a local community. The first examines the discourses of nonprofit organizations and their links to local

communities; a second examines health as a relationship between official medical discourse and those discourses used by patients in local communities; a third explores environmental discourses used by agencies and social factions in local communities; a fourth explores political processes through the cultural discourses of governing groups, local political factions, and their interrelationships. Each creates knowledge about agencies and about local communities through their cultural discourses; all suggest ways of creating necessary bases of knowledge which can be used not only to understand local concepts and conduct, but also to build cooperative links between cultural discourses, between agencies and local communities.

A recent monograph by Trudy Milburn (2009) has examined in detail the discourses of "non-profit organizations." The study focused on two such organizations, a Puerto Rican Cultural Center, and a Family Center (see also Milburn, 1998). While each is in an urban area of the eastern US, and while each fulfills a legal definition of a "non-profit," each is also designed in its own ways through the discourse used by its members. Milburn highlights in her studies issues of membership, which demonstrates several important points. First, according to Milburn, devices for demonstrating membership are various including organizationally specific terms, sequences, and their symbolic meanings; second, members express a sense of membership in the nonprofit in ways which are unique and distinctive to its local purposes; third, the process whereby this is done is different in each organization, as each has its own discursive way of speaking; fourth, the discourse members use has its own history, and that history is used today with its own mission in view; and finally, the discourse one uses as a member of such an organization is intimately tied to the "community context" in which the organization operates (Milburn, 2009, pp. 25-35). How an organization is locally inscribed, how it changes itself, and how it projects its future actions, all can be understood as a communication process, according to Milburn, yet each needs to be discovered, described, and interpreted through its own terms to be understood, especially the particular links between an organization and its local community(ies).

Understanding the relationship between organizations and communities in this cultural and ethnographic way allows Milburn to understand the world each has created, what membership in it means

to those who work, or volunteer there. This type of knowledge helps bridge potential gaps described above by drawing attention to the particular ways agencies do their work. Cultivated and suggested in Milburn's studies is an ability to identify, then to reflect upon the discourse members use from the inside, which makes them members of that organization, and also to reflect upon the other, from the outside, those with whom the organizational members want to work cooperatively. One way Milburn (2009, p. 101) addresses this learning is as a "reflexive" ability, recommending that one should be able to consider one's and other's stances, what is being said, but also what is left unsaid, what is deemed credible with one's agency, yes, but also what is credible in local community(ies), keeping both in view in order to move cooperatively ahead.

A second group of studies has examined health communication in ways that has bridged medical and local communities. Lauren Mackenzie (2005, 2007) conducted a detailed and rich study examining the discourses of people with "Williams Syndrome" (WS) and compared it to the medical discourse about it. She discovered the medical discourse defined people with WS according to "disabilities" such as a "disease," a "medical condition," or as a "rare genetic condition." A detailed definition is stated as follows: WS is "a rare congenital (present at birth) disorder characterized by physical and developmental problems including an impulsive and outgoing (excessively social) personality, limited spatial skills and motor control, and intellectual disability." This is a medical definition about a people which health agencies serve. However, when listening to WS people who lived together at the Berkshire Hills Music Academy, Mackenzie discovered a different, richly textured and detailed discourse. Through it, WS people themselves expressed a sense of their being differently, along three radiants of meaning. One was as "normal," as "just people," as "human beings." Mackenzie helps us understand the world from the view of WS people as, to them, a normal and everyday way to be. But furthermore, this way is discussed by them as quite "positive," as focused on "the warm, friendly, outgoing, smart, and [musically] talented" people they are, who are living together at the Berkshire Academy. A third expression focused on "feeling," especially a gifted ability to feel music, and a general style of life guided perhaps more by emotional feel than by traditional thought. And so, Mackenzie helps us understand how a person like this is differently conceived, and conducted, within these

two different cultural discourses. Her findings are of use not only to medical providers who seek to understand WS, but also to families, friends, and community members who are connected to this "positively feeling-full" (WS) community of people.

A study with a similar ethnographic design was conducted by Cynthia Suopis (2002). She focused on the ways women struggle with a medical discourse about menopause, and how that medical discourse is related to another they create about it in order to negotiate their health care options (Suopis, 2002; Suopis and Carbaugh, 2005). Suopis found that the medical industry conceives of menopause as a "medicalized" condition, and as such, understands this life stage as "unnatural," sub-optimal, or in some sense flawed, abnormal, and in need of some remedy. It is this conception of menopause that is used prominently and cultivated by the medical community and some women. As a result, a diagnosis of that condition is called for, although in any one case this diagnosis may be inexact and uncertain, for one may not know exactly when menopause begins and ends, and of what it consists for any one woman. As a result, when presented with this medical discourse, a physical condition deemed sub-optimal, women discuss possible pharmaceutical treatments from hormone replacement to ingestion of tea, and so on which are varied and of variable use. The women's discourse, then, must grapple with the various concepts and definitions from medical experts concerning "menopause" and its treatment. A woman's own subsequent discourse variously appropriates this medical discourse through an elaborate process of decision-making which may lead some to adopt a pharmaceutical treatment. Others are led to conceive of this life stage differently, denying that menopause is a "medical condition" at all, and conceive of it simply as a "stage-of-life," "anti-puberty," indeed as a natural part of being, in their words, being a "baby boomer" today. It is this holding in view both the "official" medical discourse, and that used by women at this stage of life, which makes Suopis' study so important. It allows a better understanding of the medical community, a better understanding of the women it is designed to serve, and thus provides useful knowledge – for the medical community and the women - for bridging gaps between the two.

A third study of health practices has examined how campaigns operate through culturally distinctive assumptions, especially in the US and in Russia

(Carbaugh and Khatskevich, 2008). In this study, we demonstrated the utility of cultural research by examining public health campaigns which were employed to improve specific health outcomes such as a decrease in alcohol use, or in the incidences of sexually transmitted infections. Designed for North American communities and by North American public health specialists, one campaign conceived of “health” as a matter of reasoned judgment, individual choice geared towards rationality, an outcome of personal actions, with a focus on biological well-being. Sub-optimal health outcomes were (and are) understood through medical diagnoses. The campaigns were (and are) based on the idea of changing the Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) of the “target populations.” These practices and premises about reproductive health, these concepts and their meanings, were widely intelligible and taken-for-granted in the designing agency; they were also largely effective in various local communities of North America.

When this discourse of “health” was applied, however, in some East European and Asian communities, however, the campaign did not demonstrate as effective results or any actual health improvements. Why is this so? In these communities, “health” was conceived and conducted differently. At its cultural discursive base, health was deemed a matter of good relations with others, of emotional well-being, and of overall moral health. In these local communities, in other words, the basic premises for health were grounded in situated practices of social living more than in individual actions, moral rather than physical matters, and proper emotional living with others more than biological well-being. Diagnoses of good health, as a result, in these local settings, revolved around how well one lives with others, rather than diagnoses of one’s personal physical being.

This type of analysis demonstrates how agency conceptions and conduct can render health in its own way on the bases of presumed reasons, individual choice, personal matters, and medical diagnoses. These premises can ground a set of cooperative relations which are relatively alien to other local communities, and is relatively ineffective when used there. If matters of health are understood in other local terms, as focused on emotional well-being, proper morality, and positive social relations, more effective, cooperative practices can be designed and delivered when working there.

A third type of study has examined relationships between environmental agencies and local communities. These studies have given detailed attention to ways each conceives of “nature” or “the environment,” how each conducts oneself in relation to a specific physical place, and to identifying gaps between environmental discourses used in agencies and in local communities, as well as between factions of local communities.

Eric Morgan (2002, 2003) has comparatively examined cultural discourses pertaining to water and the landscape in four local communities of western Massachusetts, including a governmental “watershed initiative.” He was able to show how local conceptions of “water” varied, not only between communities, but also between communities and an environmental agency. His findings help us understand the nature of gaps between discourses about “water” and other natural resources. They also provide crucial knowledge that should help cooperatively bridge gaps between agency initiatives and local communities. How? Understanding each discourse on its own helps us work knowingly and productively with various local conceptions about, and conduct regarding “water,” including those in use by government agencies and scientific communities generally.

An earlier study examined landscapes similarly, through contesting discourses about the nature and use of land in western Massachusetts (Carbaugh, 1996). This study discovered that a parcel of land adjacent to Mount Greylock, Massachusetts’ highest peak, was being discoursed very differently, and thus being acted upon with divergent and discordant objectives. One discourse in the drama championed “development,” as another advocated “preservation.” The former made the land a resource for economic development, targeting the goals of financial advantages, job creation, and employment for the region’s people and children; the latter made the land a valued natural preserve, targeting the deep literary tradition of the area, the aesthetic value of the land, and the intrinsic worth of the natural site. The detailed analyses of the two discourses was presented to, then used by the state’s Department of Environmental Management. At one point during a public hearing, the Director of the DEM presented a “new plan,” effectively using the discourses of both groups in an effort to move beyond the deadlocked tension of the public drama, and beyond the state’s

earlier “development” proposals. Knowing both discourses, and working them together, helped the community move beyond intractable conflicts to more cooperative work together.

Issues of “land,” homeland, environment, and security can be particularly vexing for people, especially when new immigrants disregard Native people. Pua Aiu (1997) studied how the Hawaiian government’s sense of its land, particularly Kohoolawe Island, was deeply different from Native Hawaiians’ discourse about the same land. The difference could not have been more dramatically demonstrated when that island, a site of traditional native sacred ceremonies, was adopted by the Navy as a site for its military practices. A public outcry about the matter resulted in a public hearing on the matter. At times, during those public meetings, the deep Native Hawaiian discourse about their land was incoherent to government and naval officials who spoke differently about it, leading to a frustrated ideal of democratic deliberation, and showing what education was indeed needed to enhance understanding and to advance more cooperatively toward justice.

Dynamics as these are apparent in many other places, including other sites in the United States where a people’s homeland is claimed, discussed and narrated by members of different nations, Native and non-native people alike (Carbaugh and Rudnick, 2006). Each shows how the discourse cultivated by government agencies can differ dramatically from its local peoples, as can the government discourse with the one(s) active not only in local communities, but also of other nations as well.

Cultural discourse analyses about the links between local governments and their constituencies have found the crucial importance to democratic agencies and institutions of understanding constituents’ local discourses. This is not only the case when the government is at odds with a local community, but also is particularly the case when considering more socially aligned political and democratic processes. Rebecca Townsend (2006, 2009) has discussed the importance of understanding local strategies for the conduct of democracy, for these are distinctively different from, or particular realizations of broad ideals of democratic action. Related studies by David Boromisza-Habashi (2007a, 2007b, 2008) have systematically and in a highly refined way analyzed “hate speech” in Hungary. His

studies show how different political groups utilize “hate” with a different understanding of their rights, their polity, and their responsibilities as members. Each of these studies has demonstrated how government discourses and legal codes are differently used by different political groups, creating gaps in the conception of free expression, the conduct of political life, and the challenge each presents to future cooperative political actions.

An Exemplary Program of Work: The SNAP Project

In the past few years an important global project has been designed by Derek Miller, Project Manager, and Lisa Rudnick, Lead Researcher (see Miller and Rudnick, 2008); I have served on the Advisory Group of this project. The Security Needs Assessment Protocol, or SNAP, is housed within the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDR) in Geneva, Switzerland. The purposes of the project are many, chief among them being the development of an analytic procedure which applies uniquely and creatively to concerns of “security.” The SNAP project brings into view an agency’s discourse, and that of a local community, then designs ways the two can work effectively together in order to understand “security” and to advance it in local field sites. Miller as Project Manager, and Rudnick as its Lead Researcher, along with an international alliance of scholars, has worked this procedure through with innovation, precision and care. I provide a brief and very general overview of only one general part of this procedure in which follows. The more detailed applications to security assessments, peace operations, international development, and/or humanitarian action are available in Miller and Rudnick (2008).

A SNAP project starts when an agency has need of local, cultural knowledge in order to conduct its work; and when the agency contacts the SNAP team for assistance in doing that work, that is, in understanding the local culture of a community. The SNAP procedure is designed generally to consult with an agency in order to reflect upon its needs through its discourse, then to examine deeply a local community and its discourse, and finally to bridge potential gaps between that agency, and that local community which an agency seeks to serve.

A first phase of research involves developing a familiarity with an agency’s discourse including its

sense of its primary domain, and its sense of its tasks for a specific field project. For example, in 2009, Miller and Rudnick are leading the SNAP team in a project with UNICEF, an agency devoted to the welfare of children. One objective is to seek ways to decrease children's involvement in violent activities in eastern Nepal. A first phase of research, then, is dedicated to understanding an agency's general sense of its mission, and of the specific objectives it needs to accomplish in a particular field site. This phase of investigation is crucial for it generates knowledge about the agency and the way it conceives of its work, its conduct pertaining to that work, and its ways of working with communities as it carries its work forward.

A second phase of research is a complicated one for it involves pre-field work activities concerning a specific field site, the assembly of a complex field research team, and analyses based upon the work of the team members in the field. A general methodology for this type of work has been described elsewhere (Carbaugh and Hastings, 1992, 2005, 2007; Miller and Rudnick, 2008; Philipsen, 1997, 2002). Here, note that a considerable amount of time and effort is given to generating knowledge of a particular local community, by understanding the discourses of those who are active there. The team of researchers involves not only specialists in cultural research, but also specialists of the area, and lay-folk in the area, all of whom work together to formulate an understanding of the local community. This work involves, for example in the case of eastern Nepal, understanding local premises and practices of Tharu people including their sense of good living, as well as sources of conflict and violence in their home region. A deep understanding of a local community's ways of living are essential to working with each community, and the second phase of research is devoted precisely to understanding those ways.

A third phase of research involves assessing the relationship between the agency's discourse about its mission and the local community's discourse(s) about its current circumstances. This involves detailed work with the agency itself, and with the community in which the agency is working. In the process, investigators develop strategies for working in that local community which are effective to the agency, and sustainable within the community. The design is of course a plan for cooperative action among agency and local community members. When effectively done, this helps not only the agency, but the

community move in ways it deems appropriately sustainable, given its own sense of its history, present, and future.

The procedure, only briefly described here, has to date focused on issues of security in Ghana and Nepal (see Miller and Rudnick, 2008). As a general methodology and theory, it has applicability to many issues including environmental, health, political and any other concern as reviewed above. The analytic procedure, then, does not rely on only one topical concern, but on a way of developing cultural knowledge through local communication practices of any human group. As such, it can serve potentially any human occasion where one group of people is working with another, both needing to be understood in order to work cooperatively together. A way of addressing this need is to understand each group, an agency and a local community, as a cultural discourse, deeply embedded in its own circumstances, its own local conceptions (or premises), its ideas about proper conduct (or practices), and its means of cooperative action. The general purpose is to keep each such discourse in view, in order to design ways to work both cooperatively together.

Particularizing Policy through Cultural Discourse Analysis

The research projects reviewed and discussed above are designed to address existing gaps between groups who conceive of their worlds, and act within them, in distinctive and particular ways. A complex procedure is employed which systematically examines institutional discourse, in addition to those at work in a local community. As a result of employing that procedure, better practices can be developed in each situation, better because each is more effective for an agency, and better because each is more sustainable for a local community. At least that is our idea.

The methodology of cultural discourse analysis also has radical implications for developing policy. As is well known, policy statements often hover at a rather abstract level, above the social and cultural grounds where people live their everyday lives. The procedure we employ is radical as it requires, as a matter of policy itself, a "particularizing" thrust which socially situates such statements in the contexts of local discourses, prior to the conduct of advancing an agency's work there. It offers a

methodology also for creating parity between groups, each given its due, being understood on its own terms, being sensitized to local dynamics, of an agency, community, or communities, all providing bases for conducting cooperative action among those involved. All efforts at designing local strategies will certainly not be totally effective, but our belief and our hope is that more efforts will be.

Policy is defined as a “course of action” which is often coupled with notions of “influence” and “expediency.” Our general proposal brings together policy and its implementation. One cannot be done without the other. Our specific proposals for policy development suggest building a course of action in ways that insist upon knowing the particulars of context and community, that is, in designing local practices in ways that investigate deeply the particularities of peoples in places, then work with those local understandings of specific situations and communities. Some criteria for such policy-making, to the extent such policy involves action in field sites, could be formulated as follows, as a tentative set of particularizing elements:

- 1) Treat an agency or organization as you treat a local community, both as distinctive localized discourses, each in need of careful study and reflection;
- 2) Treat the discourse of each as an historically based expressive system of concepts and conduct, as a communication system of local premises as well as practices (i.e., even global statements are localized);
- 3) Observe those concepts in conduct, exploring each discourse in its situated details, coming to know not only its typical ways, but its preferred ideals as well;
- 4) Give deep and detailed attention to the relations between the discourses noting points of overlap in premises and practices, as well as points of difference;
- 5) Design cooperative linkages among the discourses in ways which exploit the similarities, and productively address the differences;
- 6) Caution: A point of similarity may be a deeper difference under cover of a presumed similarity (i.e., an “invisible misunderstanding” as in Carbaugh, 2005, p.);
- 7) A point of difference requires careful care in its interpretation, translation, and in understanding the range of actions associated with it.

Our recommendations suggest a course of action in the design and implementation of policy. The set, tentatively formulated here, may not sound like policy based recommendations to many as they are formulated from an approach unlike those typically used for example in development communication. In other words, they are unlike typical strategies for social change as in diffusion based models, and participatory models (e.g., see the review by Servaes, 2008). In fact, perhaps what we offer is more of a prolegomenon to policy, a necessary set of cultural conditions for understanding indeed what pertains to any policy and what it indeed is, if particularized in places. On the basis of these understandings, local, cooperative strategies for action can be effectively built, sustainable practices promoted.

The idea of localizing policy and cultural research is of course not new, but this methodology for implementing the idea is. Designing better practices in these ways may take a bit longer, but the efforts so far seem promising, with much work yet to be done!²

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¹ The body of work behind this exposition is extensive. A review complementary to this one can be found in Philipsen, 2009, where the literature reviewed also includes some of our colleagues at, or from the University of Washington. The two programs share commitments to the ethnography of communication, work cooperatively in some of their projects, and have created cumulatively a large and deep body of work.

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