

WORKING TOWARDS SOCIAL JUSTICE WITH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH: BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES



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Social Justice in Changing and Challenging Times
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INTRODUCTIONS

WHAT DOES PARTICIPATION
MEAN?

PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

- ◉ Participatory research is the co-production of knowledge
 - A counter - hierarchical approach to knowledge production...
- ◉ [it] deliberately invert[s] who constructs research questions, designs, methods, interpretations and products...Researchers from the bottom of social hierarchies, the traditional objects of research, reposition as the subjects and architects of critical inquiry.

(Fine et al 2007)

PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES VS PARTICIPATORY METHODS

Doing research in a participatory way means two things:

⦿ a **METHOD**:

Using certain techniques of data collection and analysis

- e.g. diagramming, community mapping, art, photography etc

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⦿ an **APPROACH:**

Doing the research in collaboration with the people it is 'about'

- Sharing collecting data, doing analysis, interpreting findings, writing up, deciding on follow up action

THE RANGE OF PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES

- ◉ Acronyms are multiplying:
 - PR, PA, PAR, PRA, PLA, RRA, RA, CBR, CBPR, FPAR, TPAR..... 😞
(and their content and meaning: what processes, ownership, political intent?)
- ◉ Distinctions are blurred
- ◉ But we add *Participatory* to Action Research in order to signal a **political commitment, collaborative processes and participatory worldview** (Reason and Bradbury 2006)
to distinguish it from the ‘miscellaneous array ... [of research] that attempts to inform action in some way’ (McTaggart 1997:1).

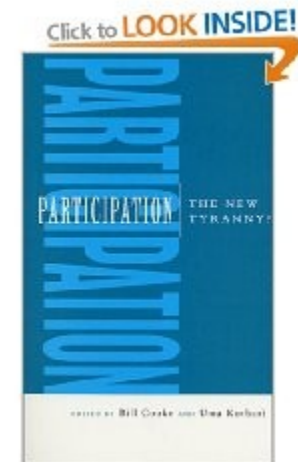
ROOTS AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

- ◉ Inspiration from independence, peace, civil rights campaigners
- ◉ Gandhi (1868-1948) - “soul power”
- ◉ Critiques of “development”
- ◉ Paolo Freire and “conscientization”
- ◉ PAR developed in poorer countries
- ◉ Influenced by feminism and indigenous politics
- ◉ The spread to the Global North



PARTICIPATION: THE NEW TYRANNY?

- ◉ Influential book by Cooke and Kothari (2001)
 - A critique from within development profession
- ◉ Participation has become hijacked and is widely used to *entrench* power
- ◉ It may not be capable of delivering its key principles of equality, sustainability and the empowerment of poor people
- ◉ It may do the opposite



EXAMPLES

- ◉ What examples are there of “participation as tyranny” within your experience / organisation?

INSTITUTIONALISATION...

◉ What are the dangers?

- Ownership and power not with communities
- De-radicalisation?
- Participation is no longer a *decentralized* method of research/development
- Becomes driven by other political imperatives?
- At its worst - becomes a tool to stifle dissent?

“In many areas of social policy, participation remains a buzzword which is rarely fully employed. The same dangers can trip up academic researchers, however laudable their intentions” Pain and Francis (2003)

- The example of community safety
- The example of University-community engagement

THE RESPONSE

- ◉ to give up! or not start...
to remain with conventional research approaches
- ◉ to emphasise the ‘action’ element of participatory research
- ◉ to work towards genuine participation in research, beyond the data collection stage
 - Ownership of research
 - Intent of research
 - Give and take
- ◉ to open up institutions to communities
- ◉ to retheorise participation

EXAMPLES: RACHEL

- Research by invitation
- Jointly agreeing questions/agenda
- Diverting University's resources/skills/time to community groups
- Publishing jointly:
 - With participants
 - As a collective - mrs kinspaisby
- Involving 'community' in University activities
- Durham undergraduates undertaking community research
- Centre for Social Justice and Community Action



Durham University

Centre for Social Justice
and Community Action

- ◉ An international centre of excellence for theoretically informed participatory and community-based research. We do not see 'thinking' or 'theory' as separate from 'practice', or Universities as the only place where thinking and theory happen.
- ◉ A locus for good practice in this type of research and associated initiatives in teaching, training, engagement and staff development.

www.dur.ac.uk/beacon/socialjustice