

Working 'with' not working 'on': the theory and practice of collaborative community research programmes



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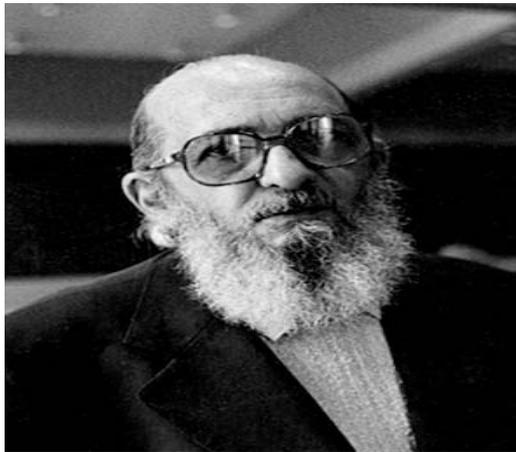
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Presentation Outline

- To consider philosophical and political background to collaborative research
- Examine the types of ‘partnership’ and ‘participatory’ research which exist
- Consider why they may be appropriate for ‘hard to reach’ groups
- Explore examples from funded research with Refugee Women and Gypsies/Traveller/Roma
- Challenges and Benefits to using PAR/Collaborative Research
- PAR and the Institutional setting – forward planning for success

Participatory Research Approaches

- Largely concerned with social action/justice
- Large body of Participatory Action Research – influenced by work of Paulo Friere (1921-1997) the community educator /critical pedagogist and Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) political theorist.



- Friere – critical pedagogy which challenges concept of passive recipients of education/learning (1970)
- For Gramsci, all people are intellectuals and philosophers. "*Organic intellectuals*" who take their local knowledge from life experiences, and use that knowledge to address changes and problems in society. (Gramsci, 1971)
- By placing such pedagogic models within a research paradigm it is possible to devise 'translational research'.

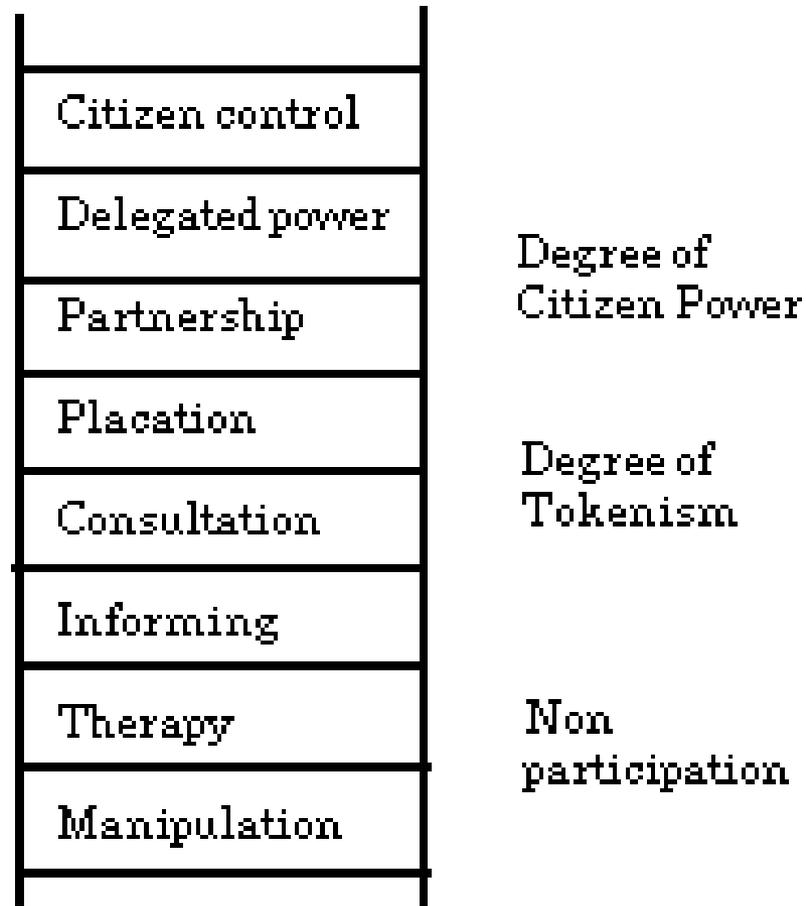
- Friere (1982): actors create research within a dynamic model
- Thus PAR researchers are co-learners/researchers with others (including academic professionals) who are part of the research process
- Classical PAR theory proposes repeated cycles similar to the policy making cycle – typically however a shorter-term single-cycle model – shared planning, action and evaluation.

Research as Politics

- Participatory Research is an explicitly socio-political mode of research.
 - Embedded within the model is the principle that:
 - participants practice critical reflexivity,
 - seek to democratise research and
 - focus on processes; knowledge development and skills enhancement of the team
 - **not** just outcomes
- (see further McNiff and Whitehead, 2009)

- How such research is 'performed' is also an active statement of political and policy ideals:
- 3 core types of participatory research:
 - Consultation
 - Participatory
 - Partnership

Sherry Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Participation



- Projects outlined below sought to practice full partnership/citizen controlled research
- in practice (funding constraints, technical requirements such as use of complex data manipulation and relatively tight timetables) they became nearer to the far end of participatory research rather than Partnership/Co-Production
- **Nb:** shifting awareness of the degree of practical engagement in the UK (policy and public reactions to the Cambridge GTAA in 2005-6)

CASE STUDY 1: Cambridge GTAA

- The first study in the UK to engage with Gypsies and Travellers as PAR team members (Home & Greenfields, 2006).
- **Methodology** – multi-level and mixed methods. Development of questionnaire on housing/public service need + training of community interviewers from Gypsy/Traveller populations. Input into questionnaire + identification of sample frame + feed-in to topic guide for focus groups. 313 interviews undertaken + series of focus groups.
- **Challenges** – untested model + lack of statistical evidence + resistance to project
- **Outcomes** – agreed report (community + politicians + academic team)
- Development of on-going community forum for Gypsies/Travellers and politicians/local agency staff to meet in ‘safe space’ and debate key issues; planning needs etc. Upskilling of interviewers (all of whom went onto further interviewing/community project employment). Acceptance of model as viable and accepted as ‘best practice’ in Government advice + replicated elsewhere in the UK

CASE STUDY 2: Traveller Economic Inclusion Project

- **Background:** First economic inclusion study in Europe on the mechanisms and change drivers experienced by Gypsies, Traveller and Roma over recent decades (Ryder & Greenfields, 2010). Set out to explore reasons for economic/employment marginalisation and the routes to success of financially stable members of the populations.
- **Challenges:** as above re: accommodation issues coupled with cultural resistance to discussion of income generation and financial affairs. Elite community members reluctant to disclose ethnicity for fear of racism and loss of employment opportunities. All of England included in sample – devising sampling frame to include different ethnic groups and regions of country + gender/socio-economic stratification.
- **Methods:** smaller group of experienced community interviewers involved in depth interviewing + development of questionnaire + covering larger areas. One-to-one feedback for participants as required + through community projects. Dissemination of findings via report + pod-casts + conferences
- **Outcomes** – Department of Work and Pensions some take up of specific recommendations. Funding obtained for number of community groups to provide training on tax, book-keeping and project development as identified as key drivers of economic success for those involved in forms of ‘traditional’ employment practice. Funding for single- gendered groups re community development project upskilling for women and manual skills training for young men. On-going monitoring by funding bodies re: success and longitudinal change – impacted now by austerity budgets/funding cuts.

CASE STUDY 3: Refugee and Asylum Seeking Womens Project (2012-13)

- **Background:** refugee and asylum seeking women are often exceptionally vulnerable or traumatised and face repeat victimisation whilst in the UK. (e.g. sexual violence; mental health issues; homelessness and exploitation by legal advisors). Project aims to train RASW to train health and legal professionals on their experiences in seeking services with the intent of improving care and services whilst upskilling women to become community advocates.
- **Challenges:** diverse linguistic/literacy skills; recruiting women with time/energy and stability (dispersal practices) to participate. Shame/stigma re a number of issues; fear of complaining/challenging legal and health care professionals. Legal status of women may be precarious.
- **Methods:** IDRICS advised/co-wrote funding application. Recruitment of women through diverse organisations/advice groups. Interviewing for vulnerability of potential PARs + linguistic skills. Identification of mixture of ethnicities, religions and backgrounds. Ethics and skills training. IDRICS/MG involvement in key areas of project e.g. Development of training materials for IARS and PAR. Delivery of training sessions re thematic identification of topics and supporting women with analysis and development of recommendations for training programmes for delivery by RASW to health/legal professionals .
- **ONGOING** – report to be developed and piloted with RASW. Training materials to be planned and devised in differing formats – e.g DVD/face-to-face delivery/VLE etc.
- **Outcomes to date:** Guidance on interviewing/PAR for RASW (see below under associated reading). Generation of presentation of programme by women for professionals, conclusion of analysis and identification of key aspects of programme to be delivered to professionals by the PAR/community advocates in training.

Challenges and Benefits of PAR

- **Challenges/arguments against PAR**
- Competing aims/potential conflict
- Resistance from funders/academy
- Unclear lines of accountability
- Reduced ownership of analysis for academic- challenges to the hierarchy
- Quality of data
- Academic overly

- **Benefits**
- Process allows traditionally marginalised voices to be heard
- Competing claims for the research agenda can be made
- Academic voice does not drown out others during analysis – ‘subjects’ are not misinterpreted or misquoted
- Community members

PAR and the Institutional Setting

Planning for Success

- An academic team's home institution can help or hinder engagement in PAR
- Need
 - top-down commitment to flexibility
 - to ensure that community members are able to engage in research teams on equal terms
 - practical ways of ensuring community members aren't discriminated against (accidentally or on purpose)
 - methods that mean community expertise is respected, and individual circumstances and knowledge capital are taken into account

Examples:

- **Ethics Clearance:** - academics are bound by ethics – but shouldn't be 'hide-bound'.
- PAR community team members are fully competent and discerning in recognising ethical dilemmas and appropriate behaviours
- Don't create difficulties where none need exist and be aware of power-differentials without being unduly paternalistic
- **Barriers to payment of community members** – hugely and unduly complex in the UK. Creaking, suspicious bureaucracies can lead to loss of engagement in PAR. Avoid multiple forms and consider appropriate methods of oral reporting and witnessing.
- **Institutional support for academic researchers under pressure from commissioners or external agencies – e.g. media.** – stand up for your team against 'doubters' and vested interests. Devise strategies re: likely outcomes.
- Listen to PAR community members – academics and bureaucracies don't always know best.
- **Design for the worst, hope for the best and plan ahead for success**

- *“Its [PAR] strength lies in its focus on generating solutions to practical problems and its ability to empower practitioners – getting them to engage with research and subsequent development”*. (Meyer, 2004, 454).
- *“Co-producing research entails tussling with the dialectic between unity and difference, sovereignty and interdependence, the self and the other. Co-producing research holds the potential for creative coalitions but also the possibility of the clash of civilizations”*. (Orr & Bennett, 2010, 202)

Suggested Further Reading

- Arnstein, S (1969) A Ladder of Citizen Participation, *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, Vol. 35, No. 4, pp. 216-224
- Blackburn, H., Hanley, B & Staley, K (2010) [Turning the pyramid upside down: examples of public involvement in social care research](#) Eastleigh: INVOLVE/NIHR
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum Publishing Company.
- Freire, P. (1982). Creating alternative research methods. Learning to do it by doing it. In B. Hall, A. Gillette & R. Tandon (Eds.), *Creating knowledge: A monopoly* (pp. 29-37). Toronto: International Council for Adult Education
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Greenfields, M (2013) *Action research with Refugee women: good practice and solutions to community participation* London/High Wycombe: IARS/IDRICS available at: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/125286265/Action-Research-With-Refugee-Women-Good-Practice-and-Solutions-to-Community-Participation>
- Greenfields, M & Home, R (2006) Romani Studies - Assessing Gypsies' and Travellers' needs: Partnership working and 'The Cambridge Project' *Romani Studies*, 16(2), pp105-131
- McNiff, J. and Whitehead, D. (2009). *Doing and Writing Action Research*. London: Sage Publications
- Meyer, J (2004) What is Action Research in Seal, C (ed), *Social Research Methods: A Reader*, Oxford, Routledge
- Orr, K & Bennett, M (2010) Editorial, *Public Money and Management*, 30 (4), pp199-203
- Ryder, A & Greenfields M (2010) *Roads to Success: routes to economic and social inclusion for Gypsies and Travellers*; London, ITMB available at: http://www.irishtraveller.org.uk/images/roads_to_success.pdf