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Participatory Research: Review and Reflection

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Participatory Research: Review and Reflection

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Participatory Research: Review and Reflection

Abstract

Participatory research is, at one and the same time, a means of investigating social reality, a pedagogy for the powerless and alienated, and a way of creating knowledge that transforms that social reality. This paper reviews ten case studies published as participatory research. These studies report participatory research experiences in the U.S.A., Canada, Chile, Tanzania and India. An analysis is made of the methods used, the source of the question guiding the inquiry, the role of social transformation, and the connections that these ten efforts may have with Marxist theory. Special attention is given to the concept of praxis, as described by Paulo Freire, and the relation of praxis to participatory research. A description of participatory research is developed that draws clear distinctions between participatory research and action research, and that supports the author's contention that participatory research is liberatory pedagogy in process.
Participatory Research though not new, can certainly be termed emergent. While showing great consistency in the enthusiasm and creativity in the research process, the case studies describing participatory research are less uniform in many other areas. As more people become involved in participatory research, and more descriptions of political, educational, information-gathering and problem-solving activities are published under the name of participatory research, it becomes increasingly important to refresh our definition and our assumptions concerning participatory research.

This paper draws from a variety of participatory research case studies. These case studies are used to illuminate certain key features of participatory research in action. First, the context of participatory research: where participatory research is taking place, with whom and on what scale. Next, the activities that characterize participatory research in action. Finally, the assumptions that underlie participatory research activities: what questions guide the inquiry and who identifies them, the role of participatory research in social transformation, and the connections with Marxist theory.
Participatory Research: Review and Reflection

With the perspectives from the case studies fresh in mind, I examine the concept of praxis, as described by Paulo Freire, and the connection it has with participatory research. Finally, an attempt is made to reconcile the divergences in the literature by presenting a brief definition and description of participatory research as a pursuit distinctly different from action research.

The Context of Participatory Research

The cited case studies describe participatory research efforts in both rural and urban Canadian settings (Barndt, 1980; Jackson, 1978 and 1980), in rural, industrial and metropolitan settings in the United States (Brown, 1981; Gaventa, 1980; Comstock and Fox, Note 1; Horton, Note 2; Santos Rivera, Note 3); in the rural Dhulis district in northern India (Kanhare, 1980), in a village in socialist Tanzania (Mduma, 1980), and in rural Chile under Allende (Falabella, 1980).

Jackson (1980) describes a project in northern Canada involving over 700 Canadian Indians in a struggle to gain adequate sanitation infrastructure for their community. The project described spans more than five years at a cost of approximately $25,000. The funding for the project was a combination of community contri-
bution and public funds. In this effort, the local Indian community resisted the plans of the government to install an improved sewer system that would exclusively service the non-Indian residents of that community. Through this struggle the community attempted to redirect the focus of the government's effort to include the entire community, and to include specific water and sanitation concerns as defined by the Indians. A long and difficult process is described as the Indian community becomes more militant and more empowered, and the government becomes increasingly intransigent.

Jackson's experience is particularly useful in illustrating the role of the outside researcher as a "committed participant and learner in the process of research which leads to militancy on his or her part, rather than detachment" (p. 61). Also, Jackson's experience at Big Trout Lake is a clear example of how a variety of outside researchers, particularly technical consultants, can be brought into the research process without harming its participatory character. Jackson describes the role of a sanitary engineer, a chemical limnologist and an environmental health specialist in the research process. The preconditions for readiness to engage in participatory research at Big Trout Lake
included the obvious economic disparity between the Indian community and the non-native residents, an increasing resistance to domination within the community—springing from the growth of outside domination and repression, and a new generation of young, literate and politically sophisticated Indians.

Gaventa and Horton both report on a participatory research experience in Appalachia, USA. In this case, the researchers and the community groups were trying to change local and federal priorities in land use research. While the governmental agencies' priority was the collection of descriptive data on who lived on the land—family size, occupation, etc., the community research group was insisting on more revealing data—the connection between absentee land ownership and poverty in Appalachia. Additionally, the groups' aspiration was to design and implement their own research on this issue using the public funds. Gaventa mentions the training of, and reliance on, school teachers, housewives, community workers and students as the field staff in this project. This experience with participatory research is similar in context to Jackson's. It was a multi-year study, in this case the funding was exclusively from public funds ($100,000), and the research process included outside specialists—
in this effort scholars from the Appalachian area worked alongside the community group. Gaventa and Horton's example is particularly strong in describing the political context of participatory research in local government in the United States. Confrontations and meetings with local government officials and federal land boards are vividly described, and the tactics the group used to overcome the intransigence of these groups are also presented. The Appalachian case study shows participatory research operating on a larger scale, over several states and many counties, and again tying technical research skills with participatory research perspectives. As before, in this case study we see the preconditions for effective participatory research including clear economic disparity, committed researchers--both "inside" and "outside", and a community in a state of readiness and resistance.

Comstock and Fox's report on the North Bonneville experience shows contextual similarities to Jackson's and Gaventa/Horton's. Again, this is a fairly large-scale undertaking as participatory research goes--an entire small town in the state of Washington (population 470) in a project spanning several years. The residents of North Bonneville were resisting the Army Corps of Engineers' plans to disburse their community throughout
the Northwest United States. Their town was scheduled to be flooded when a new hydro-powered generator was constructed. The residents wanted to relocate en masse, as a whole community, to a new area of similar geographic and cultural character nearby. The Corps resisted funding and facilitating such a move, claiming it was beyond the rights of the citizens. The case study describes the multi-year struggle as the residents of North Bonneville become conscientized to the nature of the conflict, and increasingly skilled in wielding the power of information on their own behalf. In the North Bonneville example the outside researchers were faculty and students from the nearby colleges, and the minimal funding mentioned ($1,000) came directly from the community for research support activities. The local researchers were a culturally tight-knit conservative group. The strength of their common ethical values, the particular strength of that geographic setting, and the interest and accessibility of the outside researchers were the preconditions that enabled this community to unify around a common goal: resisting cultural imperialism and technical domination.

Both Barndt and Brown also describe participatory research experiences in North America, but these endeavors are on a much smaller scale than the other North
American examples. Barndt, familiar to us from her work with literacy and media in Peru, brings us a case study of participatory research with immigrant Latin American migrant workers in Toronto. In this instance, the participatory research activity is meant as a vehicle to consciousness raising in the immigrant group. Barndt describes it this way: "It was an attempt to integrate the processes of research, education and production by involving Latin American community organizations and families in a study of themselves as a new community" (page 21). The cost, nature of funding and number of people involved in this two-year project are not detailed in the report; however, the personalness of Barndt's description of her work producing visual materials with the various groups left me with the impression that the effort was not large scale. The group Barndt worked with spanned the broad education and income range of the immigrant community. Her three co-researchers taken from the community group were a factory worker, an insurance agent and a microbiologist. Barndt appeared to be operating from a university base and had this to say about the relationship between the outside and inside researchers:

The researchers still played a major role

in guiding the process, and in piecing to-
gather visual data to represent to community groups. In this way our role was similar to Freire's notion of a culture coordinator, or IDAC's militant observer: we would take the material people would give us—their own descriptions and analyses—and re-pose them in the form of a visual product, reflecting what people were saying about their own lives. We did not pretend to be in a neutral role, as we posit no researcher can be, but we tried to respect all perspectives represented and never imposed our own narrations or rhetorical interpretations on the statements we gathered and edited.

This quote gives a good taste of the tone and focus of the article. The clear connection of theory and practice comes through consistently in Barndt's work. Besides the proximity and availability of the outside researcher in this study, the fact that several Latin American community groups were already established in Toronto, and that they were interested in exploring their common experiences as migrants, set the stage for an effective participatory research experience.
Brown gives us a remarkably different view on participatory research—so different, in fact, that he describes the effort as participative rather than participatory. This case study takes place in a factory in the United States. Poor relations between management and union resulting in low productivity and worker antagonism led the management group to invite Brown and his colleagues to spend two years investigating the problems and facilitating the solution. The cost of the project is not mentioned, nor is the exact number of people involved. Brown describes his attempts to maintain a stance of neutrality between management and union interests during the two years, and notes with obvious mixed-feelings the eventual decision of his research team of faculty and students to work only with the management group. The obvious malaise affecting the organization, the near exclusive control of funding for the effort in the management group, and the proximity and point of view of the faculty researchers were the preconditions that set the stage for this participative effort. This case study is of particular interest because it clearly illustrates the broad range of the efforts that are pursued under the participative/participatory title. It serves this purpose by distinc-
Participatory Research: Review and Reflection

Iris Santos Rivera makes a unique contribution to the group of case studies with her description of a liberatory approach to elementary education in San Diego, California. Santos Rivera describes an effort of unspecified duration with the use of few, if any, special financial resources. With the intention of facilitating the development of critical learning skills in the group of young Chicano students, Santos Rivera and her colleagues are led by the school children in an effort to reform the school lunch program. This case study is unique in that the inside researchers are children, and the outside researchers are people with whom the insiders have continued contact—both before and after this particular liberatory effort. The preconditions for the start of this project appears to be the liberatory point of view of the teachers, the flexibility of the school administration, and the extraordinary levels of awareness and militancy in these school children.

Leaving the First World now and entering the Third World, V. J. Kanhare describes a participatory research effort by the women of the Dhulis district in India. In this study, the women enter into a struggle to gain
better wages, stop sexual harassment of women by officials and land owners, and resist land appropriation and exploitation by the rich farmers. The study begins centered around the land and wage concerns; later the focus of the liberatory effort broadens to include militant action against wife beating and the drinking of alcohol by the women's husbands. No mention is made of the cost of the researcher's involvement, their identities and base of operation, or the source of funding. The preconditions for this struggle are, again, a clear and longstanding situation of economic and political inequality--this time based on class and gender--and, a history of struggle around the land issue which served as a springboard to other concerns.

Mduma takes us to a village in rural socialist Tanzania. There we find alternative research in action as the people of the village work to improve their grain storage techniques using indigenous technologies. The reconciliation of the practical need (improved grain storage) with the maintenance of cultural integrity and the resistance to technological imperialism is the conflict that is successfully resolved in Mduma's case study. The length of the effort and the exact number of participants is not detailed, nor is the sponsorship of the project or the affiliations of the outside
researcher. This is truly a grass roots effort; the outside researcher remaining well in the background for the most part. The preconditions for the use of participatory research in this case are a clearly recognized and shared problem in the village (the loss of crops due to inadequate storage techniques), and the immersion of the village in the spirit of collective self-help (Ujaama) characteristic of Tanzania.

Having looked at participatory research in North America, Asia and Africa, the last case study recounts an experience in Chile during, and briefly after, Allende. Falabella notes an approximate time span of two years in his study of the landless nomadic Chilean agricultural workers--the torrantes. With the coming to power of a leftist government in Chile under Allende, the pressure for land for peasants increased and found a sympathetic ear. Falabella shares these years with the torrantes; becoming a torrante himself, he travels and works with them, learns from them, and comes to understand what it means to be a torrante during those optimistic years and briefly afterwards. This study is primarily a description of a mutual investigation of two very different consciousnesses which, through constant sharing, grow closer together. The study was sponsored by the Wisconsin Land Tenure Centre with an
unspecified amount of support. Mr. Falabella's institutional base is not entirely clear, but I took it to be at the Wisconsin Centre. The preconditions that set this process in motion seemed to be four: the historical moment in Chile--ripe with liberatory possibilities, the astuteness and generosity of the torrantes who took the author to their side, the commitment and perseverance of the author to endure the torrantes life for two years, and, the desire of the author for dissertation on research material. The dominance of the ethnographic approach, rather than the pedagogical/political approach, is interesting and will serve as a basis for reflection and analysis later in the paper.

In this brief perusal of participatory research in practice we have seen studies termed participatory (or participative) focusing on a broad range of problems in an equally broad range of environments. These brief descriptions, however, give us only the most superficial understanding of participatory research. Let's now look at these same efforts with a bit more scrutiny; in particular, with an eye for the process of participatory research--its distinctive features in action.

**Participatory Research in Action**

In most traditional research the processes of investigation are fairly clear. A hypothesis has been
formulated by the researcher and data is needed to test the validity of that hypothesis. In an effort to keep the data, the process of researching, and the results clear, every attempt is made to isolate the significant variables affecting the research outcome. The researcher assumes a stance of neutrality—even if s/he feels strongly about the basis of the inquiry. The researcher uses people as well as documents as sources of, or objects of, information. The research results are significant in so far as they affirm or deny strong relationships between the isolated variables: for example, the relationship between poverty and the tendency to commit a crime; or, the relationship between racial group and poverty. A transfer of skills between the researcher and the researched group is not a prominent feature of traditional research, nor is the enlargement of the research question to include broad sociological considerations a common concern in the actual research process.

Alternate research designs have been emerging for a number of years, and the case studies cited in this paper illustrate a variety of those designs in action. What makes these approaches different from traditional research? In what ways is traditional research used in these efforts? By reviewing the techniques, methods
and materials cited in the case studies, some light will be shed on those questions.

Where did the question come from that guides the various inquiries described in the case studies? Who identifies the research problem, and how is that identification accomplished? I find it helpful to describe the possibilities of choice in problem identification in alternative research efforts, as falling into three categories: first, no pre-identification of any kind; second, pre-identification of a general theme; and third, pre-identification of a specific problem area embedded in that theme. Additionally, in alternate research designs, this pre-identification can be done by either the inside researchers or the outside researchers. In some cases the identification may be mutual—both the insiders and the outsiders may have pre-identified the same problem or theme. It is possible for a researcher to enter a situation with no set themes in mind and to encounter in their co-researchers in the inside group an apparent lack of thematic interests. Similarly, it is possible that an outside researcher has identified a particular problem that the researched group also recognize as a primary problem within a broader theme. For example, the researcher may enter the research process having
Participatory Research: Review and Reflection

concluded that unemployment is a crucial problem and that it is embedded within the theme of economic domination, and the inside group may also have reached the same conclusion. A matrix illustrating the way these possibilities can come together may look like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent of pre-identification before research begins:</th>
<th>Outside Researcher</th>
<th>Inside Researcher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No pre-identification at all</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-identification of the general theme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-identification of the specific problem within the theme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Linking the case studies used in this paper to this graphic results in the following display:
#### Extent of pre-identification before the research begins:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inside Researcher (beneficiary group)</th>
<th>Outside Researcher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Kanhare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-identification of general theme</td>
<td>Comstock/Fox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-identification of specific problem within the theme</td>
<td>Falabella</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santos Rivera</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above layout is, of course, open to criticism and interpretation. Nonetheless, let's start from this point and flesh out some of the approaches used in problem identification and theme identification in the case studies.

If a researcher is to enter a community with few presuppositions, having done little or no pre-
Participatory Research: Review and Reflection

identification of the focus of the research, how then will s/he discover that community's needs? Jackson's (1978) solution is straightforward: "ask the people" (p. 74). There is more to this than that simple piece of advice would indicate. Jackson (1980) goes on to detail the process of community entry and enlightenment by his research team. Since the issue was water and sanitation at Big Trout Lake, the researchers took on the tasks of hauling water and living with the community's inadequate sewage system. In the Big Trout Lake effort the community had already identified their problem, but it remained for the researchers to gain an understanding of the problem from the community's point of view. They did this by entering into solidarity with the community. Jackson recalls, "living with native families, paying room and board, hauling water and helping to prepare meals were later viewed by the consultants as activities extremely important to their experience in the research process" (p. 46). Comstock and Fox also mention the importance of living in with the people in their study. Falabella provides the most rigorous example of joining the community in his commitment to an extended period as an agricultural laborer in Chile. His decision to take that route of
discovery was preceded by six months of informal interviewing with one particular torrante.

Brown's research group entered their research situation in the factory with few presuppositions of their own. However, both the management group and the union group had identified the theme of the research and had differing points of view on how the research should be conducted. In this difficult situation Brown describes how their team developed an "empathetic questionnaire" (p. 305) constructed from interview notes. Upon completing the questionnaire, Brown's group fed back the findings to all participants in small group meetings—thereby clarifying the specific problem areas with everyone.

Kanhare's description of the effort in India indicates that the general theme was identified by the village women. However, during the early stages of the research it became apparent that the identification of particular problems within that thematic boundary would require the intervention of the outside researchers. To move the problem identification back into the hands of the women, the Dhulis research group organized a retreat for the women (termed a "camp" in the study) where the women could meet, discuss their common concerns, and assist one another in identifying problems.
to be addressed by their research.

At various places, the identification of the problem was done by the activists and the women. During the camp, it was a collective identification of the problem by the women themselves. (p. 116)

In other situations the outside researcher may have established a general theme in advance, and may seek a community group with a similar perspective. This seems to be the case in Barndt's description of the research conducted with the Latin American immigrants in Toronto. While remaining open to the community's needs and priorities, Barndt describes how, through the mutual act of strengthening the community organization, the shared themes were discovered: "Just as we were building an organizational base and developing a working methodology, some common themes were emerging" (p. 25). Barndt's statement intimates the dialectical relationship between collective liberatory effort and theme identification. The deeper we get into a description of participatory research in action, the more this dynamic will become apparent. Participatory research does not generally move in a linear fashion from problem identification to problem solution; instead, the identifying of the
Participatory Research: Review and Reflection

problem by the people in its complete historical thematic context is really a solution--an action transforming the world--in itself. Similarly, when an identified community problem is resolved, new themes arise in the process. Problem resolution also operates as problem-posing, and problem identification also serves as problem solving. More will be said later on this important feature of participatory research when the concept of praxis is explored.

Finally, the case studies reveal some researchers in a situation where the community group has identified a fairly specific problem focus before the outside researcher enters the picture. In this situation, the role of the outside researcher is that of a catalyst: a remover of obstacles to information and understanding. There is often still a need in these situations for the outside researcher to assist in clarifying the problem focus--particularly in large efforts where interests may be divergent and where the specific problems may play themselves out in a variety of different ways. Gaventa's large-scale effort in Appalachia with the land survey illustrates this point. As part of the research effort Gaventa's group gathered descriptive reports from local citizens. Through the personal life-history narratives the research group, and their pro-
agonists, would be able to discern more clearly the individual human impact of the inequitable land system. Gaventa chose to use open-ended interviews in this situation, and to train the local field staff to do the interviewing. He describes the process as follows:

While Appalachian people would be highly cautious in response to a standard questionnaire implemented by outsiders, the open-ended, locally based approach brought out a depth of feeling and a vividness of expression about corporate absentee ownership which would not otherwise have been heard. And, of course, the informal approach allowed a development of a relationship with those being interviewed that could more easily be translated later into action and organization. (p. 41)

Certainly the participatory research efforts cited differ markedly from traditional research in the area of problem identification and researcher involvement. Uncommon demands are made upon the outside researcher—often self-imposed demands—and these demands broaden the range of possibilities in the approaches used to identify themes and problems. The very act of entering
into a problem-posing and a problem-resolving relationship with the beneficiary group is uncommon in traditional research, and in fact described a pedagogical relationship. It is a unique and key feature of participatory research that all of the people involved see themselves in a mutual learning situation. The outside researcher often acts as an organizer, facilitator and problem-posing educator during the research process. In order to enter into such a pedagogical relationship with the community group the outside researcher must first enter into a relationship of trust and mutual understanding with the group. Falabella, Comstock and Fox, and Jackson have already illustrated how living with the community can be one way of accomplishing this. But other tasks remain beyond the initial entry, problem identification and gaining of trust. The outside researcher must help the people understand and take control of the actual research process. The people must know how to collect information of various kinds, how to organize it, how to analyze it and how to use it. Also they must know how to educate their peers in this process and how and when to use professional technical consultants to assist them in their effort. Finally they must know how to continually investigate and reinvestigate their theme, as new
problems and new historical perspectives are created in the praxis of their struggle.

Underscoring his group's commitment to this ethic in the research process, Jackson (1980) notes that, in the case of the Big Trout Lake effort, "Data collection, recording, and representation of findings to the community would draw upon participatory research methods and would be conducted jointly" (p. 46). Jackson accomplished this by using a variety of instructional and information sharing techniques; among them were the following:

-- translation of pertinent reports and documents into the local language,
-- community seminars and public distribution of information,
-- a fact finding trip with the community group,
-- field observation and document review with the community group,
-- the use of photo representations of the community to assist in the reflection process,
-- unstructured interviews with families in their homes, and,
-- a radio phone-in show.

The Big Trout Lake effort is also useful in showing how technical consultants, and technical research tasks, can
be accomplished within the participatory research framework. Jackson notes that among the research tasks accomplished was a chemical analysis of the water sources, and a survey of water sources and water use (p. 46). This technical research data was also fed back to the community group during public meetings. Jackson's group continually displayed their solidarity with the community group by insisting on keeping all of the research information generated in the hands of the community, even under pressure from the government.

In the factory setting, Brown's research tasks included the reconciliation of divergent points of view. His research group attempted to cut the distance between management and union by creating linking support groups (p. 306). Also, Brown's research team created and facilitated workshops on communication skills and on mutual goal-setting. Mystifying language used by management in communications to the workers was made more understandable. Until the time when his group decided to work only with management, these approaches were used to assist both the union and the management groups.

In Gaventa's land use study in Appalachia, the transfer of skills from the outside researcher to the community groups was an explicit task of the researcher. Additionally, the outside researcher actively assisted
the community group in developing collective bargaining skills to strengthen their position vis-a-vis the government power groups. In this study the community researchers collectively refused to share their research information with the authority groups until their demands had been met.

In India, Kanhare notes many non-traditional activities the researchers engaged in. In addition to the creation of the already-mentioned women's camp, he notes that the research project included these activities: attempts to influence local elections, the creation of slogans, a local version of a sit-in (morcha), strikes and the use of propaganda (p. 111). As in Appalachia, the Dhulis group adopted the tactic of collective bargaining as part of the research process. Kanhare also stresses the continual importance of the researcher facilitating reflection on the process of research and change: "A constant self-critical discussion, dialogue was the method adopted for going ahead....But self-criticism led to change" (p. 115). The description of the research process as dialogical is echoed by Mduma, "Peasants and extension personnel had developed their experiences on dialogue approach to problem solving" (p. 96). The Tanzanian group also used meetings, interviews, multi-faceted work teams, village committees,
the development of complementary and follow-up reading material and the creation of public documents from the recording of meetings to assist in researching the grain storage problem (p. 91).

The non-neutral stance of the researcher is apparent in all of the case studies. Even Brown, who was the only writer cited who initially defended the idea of a neutral researcher, eventually recognized the impossibility of researcher neutrality. Another key characteristic of participatory research has been apparent in these descriptions as well. That is, the pedagogical nature of the participatory research experience. Many of the unusual research activities already noted illustrate how this pedagogical aspect is played out in the action stages of the research: meetings, discussions, training of co-researchers, retreats, creation of documents, and other activities.

In addition to these activities, the approach of using visual materials to assist in the learning process is also common. The visual materials, in Freirean fashion, are used to illustrate particular community themes and situations, and to assist the group in placing them in a broader context. In Santos Rivera's elementary school example, visual displays were used to help illustrate aspects of the school lunch situation, and led to a
deeper organizational analysis of the lunch problem. In Barndt's case, video tape was used as an aid to critical reflection on the problems of the Latin American immigrants. The development and use of this video tape by the immigrants helped them both identify common concerns and also place their current situation in a broader historical context. Speaking to the general pedagogical emphasis of her project, Barndt says:

From the start, our task was defined not only as one of information-gathering, but also one of consciousness-raising and organization building. Research was to be combined with community education and organization. And if the research process was to be truly participatory, it had to employ methods that involved people in an active way in describing and analyzing their own experiences. We chose to use video tape as a process tool in the initial stages of the research. We interviewed community groups, played back the discussion for their own review, and exchanged tapes among groups. In this way we could develop some sense of common concerns and make organizational links unhampered by geograph-
ical barriers. At the same time as building relationships with various parts of the
community, we were involving them in defining the problems to be the focus of the
research. (pp. 22, 23)

Speaking more specifically to the use of the visual material to assist in the encoding and decoding of community problems, and the placing of them in larger perspectives, she notes, "We thus embedded an historical analysis in the visuals, with minimal narration, so that it could be decoded with smaller community groups for developing a deeper analysis" (p. 25).

In contrast to traditional research, participatory research efforts clearly recognize and use the value stance of the researcher. There is an emphasis on solidarity and militancy, not just on rapport. Additionally, participatory research efforts see the generation of knowledge through research as a joint task of the outside and inside researchers; often the lion's share of control, problem identification and solution definition is in the hands of the insiders. The entire process of the research is pedagogical. A transfer of research skills and an increasing of critical awareness in the community group is integrated into the research process. Traditional research is
carried out when deemed appropriate, however it does not dominate the process, or proceed uncritiqued. The inside and outside researchers immerse themselves in all the data, again and again, until the common themes and categories revealed by the research process become apparent to all. The themes become apparent through the very process of taking social action—as the life of the torrantes and the torrantes' concerns became apparent to Falabella as he joined with them as a torrante himself. Knowledge discovered while taking social action generates new understandings which re-frame the problem in a broader perspective and thereby generate new themes. The process builds on itself in a self-sustained process of critical reflection and action: praxis.

Participatory Research: Guiding Principles

Participatory research does more than generate information. It does more than provide a measure of the relationship between two or more variables, and it does more than provide a description of a social situation. Additionally, it does more than solve particular research problems. Based on the assumption that the generation of knowledge is an act of social transformation, participatory research seeks to transform social reality in the act of research, i.e., in the act of generating knowledge about social reality. Also, it seeks to put the force
of human value and human morality back into the reasoning process; in this sense it asserts that the only basis for judging the validity of knowledge is the basis of the human values which it expresses, not the basis of the strength of the instrumental power which the knowledge exhibits. The human values expressed in participatory research are the values of uncoerced communication, the value of people controlling their lives, and the value of people being free from technical, cultural, economic and bureaucratic domination. Participatory research posits and pursues a world of the people, by the people and for the people. There are the human ontological vocations that participatory research expresses in its practice.

Oppression blocks these ontological vocations from shaping our knowledge constitutive activities, and hence from shaping our material world. Oppression realized on the epistemological level, in positivistic instrumentality, is expressed on the material level in the unequal control of the resources fundamental to human development: access to land, food, means of exchange, and information. It is consistent, then, that so many of our case studies revolve around these concerns. Jackson, Gaventa, Horton, Kanhare, and Comstock/Fox all report on activities centered around
land use and the access to information on land use. Mduma speaks to the issue of food, while Santos Rivera and Barndt in particular, and all of the authors more generally, speak to the issue of access to the information that will place a particular problem into a broader perspective so that the forces of oppression may be recognized more clearly, acted upon and transformed. On the role of participatory research in social transformation, Jackson (1978) says, "The ultimate goal of research is the radical transformation of social reality and the lives of the people involved" (p. 61). In contrast to a reformist stance, participatory researchers make continual efforts to keep the broad historical perspective in focus. Step by step reforms are pursued, immediate problems are addressed, but the effort is focused on the seminal features of oppression. Symptoms of oppression are recognized as such, and are not confused with the causes and sources of oppression. Many of the case studies clearly show this effort to place particular problems in larger perspectives. Gaventa notes that the people from individual communities, when analysing land ownership data, began to see a larger pattern emerging. "Regional patterns began to appear, while, simultaneously, important linkages began to be made amongst people facing common issues" (p. 41).
From the experience in the Dhulis area of India, Kanhare makes this remark in regard to social transformation and participatory research:

The women began regarding themselves as human beings and fighting for their rights. They soon realized that women all over the world are struggling for their rights and against oppression, that the problems of women are not restricted to their villages but are faced by all the toiling masses, especially women. They felt that a deeper analysis of the problem was necessary. (p. 117)

And again, on this same theme, Barndt comments from the Toronto case study:

Each time we asked people to name the major problems confronting them as immigrants and as a Latin American community in Toronto, they connected their problems here with the reason for leaving their homelands; and some began to analyze the real connections between the seemingly different reasons for coming to Canada. (p. 25)
The unequal control over means of production, and the sublimation of all forms of human interaction to exploitative economic dealings, are concerns most thoroughly dealt with in Marxist theory. Many of the case studies can be seen in the light of class struggle, as the underprivileged attempt to gain control over the productive forces of social life. Additionally, it can be discerned in the case studies that the focus of resistance to oppression grow as a result of the growth of economic domination. Speaking to this phenomenon, Marxists might remind us that capitalism as an economic order contains the very seed of its own demise in its dependence upon instrumental control, growth and domination. Resistance to that oppression grows in a dialectical fashion as the oppression itself spreads through world capitalism. Of course, not all the authors make that point explicitly; some may, in fact, deny that perspective. Comstock/Fox make their theoretical perspective as outside researchers explicit when they say, "Participatory research is the method of applying that theory [historical materialism] to the actual transformation of capitalist society" (p. 3). Barndt is also clear on this point when she says, "We were creating alternative means of producing visual statements and, in the process, alternative social rela-
tions of production. We began to see the very act of collectively producing a collective product as a political act" (p. 23). Finally, Mduma's example in socialist Tanzania illustrates how participatory research can be used to support and extend a social structure based on an alternate economic system.

With the exception of Brown and Santos Rivera, and with the possible exception of Falabella, all of the authors of the case studies cited describe broad social and economic transformation as the ultimate goal of the research. Consistently, they describe a process of conscientization of the researchers as part and parcel of this process. Though all but the noted three authors are consistent on these points, I would not (nor likely would they) posit that they are all Marxists, in the corrupted way that we have commonly come to accept the word. That is, I would not posit that they hold a view of economic transformation from capitalist to progressively more socialist world economic orders as a condition for creating, a priori, or making possible, a priori, the liberation of the oppressed people of the world. The economic order that would result from the transformations induced through participatory research does not occur in front of the process of liberation. Like all other aspects of the social world, the economic
order is constantly created and re-created in the process of the people's consensually valuing, reflecting on and acting upon their world. The features of the economic order, though, would be consistent with the ontological vocation of humans to be free from economic domination.

I have excluded Brown and Santos Rivera's, and possibly Falabella's, studies from inclusion in this last discussion. Brown's organizational focus is too narrow to qualify, never entering into the realm of class analysis. Santos Rivera as well, working with children, maintains a primarily organizational focus—as seems appropriate in that situation. Falabella's research is a bit more muddy to me on this point. His focus on the gathering of descriptive material for dissertation research pushed the historical class struggle features so apparent in that Chilean moment rather far into the background. This comment is not meant to denigrate or minimize these three efforts. However, this absence of a historically critical analysis of the problem situation may make these three efforts more appropriate under some title other than participatory research, perhaps under "action research". I'll touch on that a bit more at the close of the paper.

Participatory Research and Praxis

The concept of praxis is a difficult one to get a
handle on. Rather than attempting, at this point, to create a definition of the term and evaluating the case studies according to that definition, I have attempted throughout the paper to bring the idea of praxis gradually into focus. This is appropriate, I believe, because the concept of praxis cannot be separated out from either the activities or the guiding principles of participatory research. Humans have a unique ability, beyond other animals, to see themselves in the world and to reflect upon the meaning of, and the power of, their presence in the world. This capacity for reflection is a knowledge-constitutive capacity: humans create the world by naming it, valuing it, reflecting upon it, acting upon it, and re-naming it. Fundamentally, people, in the act of resisting oppression, encounter barriers. They come to the limits of what they are "allowed" to do and have experience in doing. And, they come to the limits of their current understanding. Left at this point, there is no praxis and no transforming of the world. If at the point of encountering this limit people critically reflect on its origin and its current structure, they will come to see this limit as a feature of human agency in the world, and not as a feature of transcendent quality. The process of discovering this fact of human existence is an empowering one, as people
then become agents for themselves in creating the world and overcoming the previous limits. In a constant reflexive process, people then reflect on the world in a critical fashion and act to transform the world—bringing it more into line with the human ontological vocations. The very act of critical reflection being a transformation of the world, and the very act of action upon the world being reflective. Paulo Freire (1982) makes this statement about praxis, "Let me emphasize that my defense of the praxis implies no dichotomy by which this praxis could be divided into a prior stage of reflection and a subsequent stage of action. Action and reflection occur simultaneously" (p. 123). Not any type of thinking is transforming, only a critical reflection upon a limit situation. Not any type of activity is a transforming action in this sense, only critically informed action, upon a limit situation, with a reflective character.

Participatory research is unique in that it generates political praxis. This character, I contend, sets participatory research distinctively apart from other types of research—not only on the continuum of "radicalness", not only on the basis of the focii of the research efforts, and not only in the commitment of the researchers; but, much more fundamentally, as a
theory of human liberation in action. Participatory research, then, is liberatory pedagogy in process. Speaking to the idea of such a pedagogy, and the process of investigating generative themes, Freire makes the following comments which, we will recognize, describe much of the methodology of our cited case studies:

To investigate the generative theme is to investigate man's thinking about reality and man's action upon reality, which is his praxis. For precisely this reason, the methodology proposed requires that the investigators and the people (who would normally be considered objects of that investigation) should act as co-investigators. The more active an attitude men take in regard to the exploration of their critical awareness of reality and, in spelling out those thematics, take possession of that reality. (p. 97)

It is my view that participatory research is not just a special kind of educational methodology to be placed on the ultra liberal end of the pedagogical spectrum. Nor is it just a political perspective touting what are often considered to be radical views. Finally, participatory research is not just a type of research that can
Participatory research as praxis is the manifestation of, and the pursuit of, the fundamental human vocation to be free from domination of all kinds, and to define for ourselves, through uncoerced communication, what knowledge in fact is, and what human values our knowledge will be used to propagate. When this praxis is recognizable in a research situation, we have participatory research. When it is not, we have something else.

Participatory Research and Action Research: Definitions and Distinctions

From my readings of the case studies, I sense confusion around the distinctions between participatory research and action research. In this brief section I will attempt to clarify that confusion by presenting a brief definition of the two.

Action Research is essentially a consensual, problem-solving approach to a pre-identified group or organizational problem. Action research is generally characterized by: (1) initial identification of the problem by professional researchers or authority groups, (2) the hope to create mutually agreeable practical solutions to immediate problems while contributing to the "state-of-the-art" of social science research, (3) a social level analysis of the problem (personal, inter-
personal, group and organizational level analysis),
(4) a reformist strategy towards larger social problems,
and, (5) a minimizing of societal conflict bases in the
identification of problem causes. Action research often
finds its outlet in industrial and bureaucratic settings,
where it was in fact spawned.

It seems to me that action research in itself does
not question or seriously threaten the existing authority
in, and the existing political economy of, the problem
situation. Authority in this case should not be in-
terpreted as referring to a particular individual--such
as a particular manager, union chief, school principal,
or political official--rather, it is meant to indicate
that there is no fundamental questioning of the societal,
economic and political class structure that may make such
authority necessary, and that may make them be generally
representative of certain advantaged ethnic, racial,
religious, tribal, genderal or other groupings. This
assumption leads to narrowing the problem focus to the
psychological, interpersonal and organizational levels:
most therapists, human relations officials, organizational
development consultants, ombudspersons, and committees
with similar functions take the role of facilitating
action research solutions. Voting, campaigning for, and
supporting mainstream political candidates in some demo-
Participatory Research: Review and Reflection

1. Participatory settings can be seen as an action research approach to problem-solving.

   Just as we have seen traditional empirical research used productively and effectively in a participatory research effort, so too does action research have its strong points. The particular merits of action research include: (1) its expansion of the concept of research to include activities peopled by non-experts, (2) its focus on consensus-building techniques which may begin to stretch long-unused communication muscles in the researching group, (3) its potential to move from a reformist stance to a transformational stance during the research process, in some instances, and, (4) its role as a window of opportunity for funneling funds and support to participatory research activities under the generally safe rubric of action research.

   To say that action research has a shortcoming or problem in not being able to generate social transformation is not to understand action research. Action research is not for social transformation—it is for information gathering, communication skill-building, and fairly narrow problem-solving. Problems arise because action research resembles, on the surface, participatory research. Because of this surface similarity, action research is sometimes called upon to do
what only participatory research can do: generate praxis. When it is in this position, of course, it does not succeed in doing so. From our case studies, I would place Brown's effort clearly in that category: action research laboring under the impression that it is participatory. Brown's effort was good and useful if recognized for what it was— an organizational development effort based on action research.

Participatory research, on the other hand, is an educational-political effort pursued by oppressed groups in collaboration with politically empathetic professionals. Its purpose is to redress community-identified problems and to raise the level of political consciousness in the oppressed group; through this process, the fundamental political-economic structure of society is to be transformed. Participatory research is generally characterized by: (1) the identification of the problem by the community group, (2) the hope to create an immediate solution to a practical problem while moving towards broader, more fundamental societal transformation, (3) a societal level analysis of the problem (economic dominance, class struggle), (4) a focus on issues of equity, inequality and oppression, (5) a belief in, and a strong focus on, a dialectical process of problem solving (the develop-
ment of critical analytical skills, and of knowledge which, in the generating, is also liberating), and (6) the militancy of all involved in the process. Participatory research relies on the use of dialogue, of the critical co-investigation of reality by all involved, as its driving force.

Participatory research is based on the historical-materialist assumption that history is human-made and therefore susceptible to human re-making. Additionally, participatory research stresses that the generation of knowledge instrumental to social change can only be born in the actual process of social change. Embedded in this perspective is the fundamental concept of praxis—co- incidental reflection and action— as the uniquely human and uniquely liberating way of knowing and changing the world.

Participatory research also assumes that the existing political-economic order is unjust and must be changed. It rejects the possibility of a value-free science (including social science), and therefore also rejects the possibility of a value-free social scientist. The problem focus is on the historical political economy of the currently identified problem. Critiquing positivist instrumental social science, participatory research asserts that there is no such thing as an "objective
reality" or an "objective truth", i.e., one which can be discovered or pursued with a basic grounding in human interests and human values. The primacy of human value and human interest in participatory research leads directly to the parallel primacy of the uniquely human attributes of language and reflection in the social change process: naming the problem, reflecting on its human historical context, recognizing the problem and taking action, renaming the problem, etc., are taken to be fundamental in the participatory research process.

The preconditions for the use of participatory research include: (1) a problem that can be meaningfully framed in a larger societal context, (2) researchers with something to gain (materially, spiritually, or otherwise) from the identification and solution of the problem in a class struggle context, (3) a political climate which accommodates the pursuit of participatory research, even on a covert basis, (4) access to resources that can help frame the problem in its larger historical context, (4) the encountering of, and recognizing of, a "limit situation" by the researching group, and, (5) love, trust, militancy and commitment in all of the researchers.

Participatory research's problems seem apparent. It could be dangerous to pursue participatory research in
many political climates. It is painted with the brush of Marxism and Communism, automatically setting off many emotional alarms in the potential participants, in the people who can be of potential use to the participants, and of course to the groups that the researchers may be resisting. Also, people may be so unaccustomed to taking action on their own behalf, of seeing themselves as agents of their own history, or—in particular in developed industrial countries—of perceiving their massified conditions as being both oppressive and mutable, that the potential for dialogue and action may seem very limited at first. It may require a great deal of time and skill to successfully pursue participatory research in these circumstances.

Finally, participatory research cannot be correctly perceived of as a cluster of techniques and methods. Rather, one believes in it and practices it much as if it were a religion. It does reflect, in fact, a moral, ethical and political point of view and, once adopted, these beliefs cannot be easily abandoned to accommodate a particular situation. A commitment to participatory research is a commitment to a certain view of humanity, and a commitment to joint struggle in achieving a just and human world. It is a commitment to engage in the praxis of liberation, and to break through the limits of
oppression—including oppression that may benefit us with unequal privilege, wealth and power.

I see evidence of this praxis in many of our case studies. In Kanhare's report, in Gaventa's, Horton's, Barndt's and Jackson's, and also in Comstock/Fox's. The possible ways of illustrating praxis in a case study—of giving evidence of its accomplishment—is a subject worthy of another paper. Suffice to say, at this point, that I look for evidence of a self-sustaining process of reflection and action through which people break through the barriers of economic, cultural and bureaucratic domination, and transform their world as well as their perspective of their world.

I have started this paper with my feet firmly on the ground—following the footsteps of participatory researchers through the lives of real and struggling people. It may seem that now, at the end of this excursion, I am walking on thin air. I can only say that participatory research reaches, in one and the same motion, from the ontological to the practical—for, in the end, there is no difference between them. I will close by recalling a saying from the French uprisings of the 1960's—a saying that Marcuse also likes to quote: "Be realistic. Demand the impossible!"
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3. Santos Rivera, Iris. *Liberating Education for Little Children*. This 2½ page article describing a liberatory approach to elementary formal education for Chicano students in San Diego, was distributed as reading for a Sociology course (Soc. 704) in the Spring of 1984 at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 01003. The original source of the article is not known, but may be from a newsletter "Alternatives", dealing with Puerto Rican issues.
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