Certificate Programme

International Perspectives in Participatory Research

Unit 2

Development of Participatory Research

Units of Certificate in International Perspectives in Participatory Research

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Introduction

Unit 2 sets the context of the emergence of participatory research (PR). It is important to learn about significant historical trends that seem to have converged to contribute to the evolution of the concept and the practice of PR.

Two historical traditions represent two distinct approaches at opposite ends of the continuum:

a)   Collaborative utilisation focused research with practical goals of system improvement, sometimes called the *Northern Tradition*; and

b)   Openly emancipatory research, which challenges the historical colonial practices of research and political domination of knowledge by the elite, often called the *Southern Tradition.*

This Unit provides an overview of these two traditions. Section 2.1 will explain the ways in which action research as Northern Tradition laid the foundation of PR. Further sections will describe the liberation pedagogy of Paulo Freire, international adult education movements, participatory research networks, and participatory action research. Other sections will familiarise you with the debates around participation in international development programmes and the ways PR drew strength from such debates.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this Unit, you will be able to:

- *Understand* the influence of action research on PR;

- *Explain* the trends in Southern Tradition viz., international adult education movements, participatory research network, and participatory action research;

- *Comprehend* the debates around participation in international development programmes; and

- *Analyse* the worldview of feminist movements and anti-racist movements.

2. 1 Action Research

Northern Tradition reflected a paradigm shift from applied social science research to the participatory approach to applied research, which emphasised the problem solving approach to research and rational decision making by the group, through the intervention of the facilitator. The aim of research was both theoretical as well as instrumental. Participatory research was greatly influenced by the scholarly thoughts of action research referred to as *Northern Tradition,* (confined to the geographic North particularly North America and Europe). Kurt Lewin, a German social psychologist, promoted 'action research', thereby underscoring the need for new types of research for social transformation.

In the 1940s, Kurt Lewin rejected the positivist belief that researchers study an objective world, separate from meanings understood by the participants as they act in the world. He challenged the gap between theory and practice and sought to solve the practical problems through a research cycle involving planning, action, reflection, problem solving and rational decision making for new actions. He coined the term *action research* to describe a process where social scientists worked collaboratively with a group, organisation or community. With an emphasis on practitioners acting as equals to researchers in their research process, action research assumes that problems could be solved through institutional changes based on new knowledge, education and transformational leadership that inspire a self-reflective community of inquiry. Action science researchers have worked in the fields of organisational development and social psychology assuming that in organisations, the management and workers have equal powers to influence quality improvement (Wallerstein & Duran, 2003). Lewin's work was regarded as a conservative influence on PR because it placed less emphasis on active community participation and did not challenge existing power relationships. Nevertheless, it was useful for understanding organisational change, innovation, and improvement by combining theory and practice (Brown and Tandon, 1983).

In the 1970s, critiques of the positivist research paradigm, led scholars to seek a new approach to social change rooted in grassroots reality. They adopted Lewin's concept and method of problem solving and developed explicitly critical and emancipated action research methods, to bring together the voice of all stakeholders.

2. 1.1 Liberation Pedagogy of Paulo Freire

Southern Tradition stemmed from works in Latin America, Africa, and Asia which underscored the importance of experiential knowledge to transform society. Social transformation among oppressed groups such as indigenous people, traditional communities and women; the crisis of previous development approaches; search for practical theory; and methods for development led to the application of liberation pedagogy within the context of adult education.

Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, is the best known exponent of liberation pedagogy. He developed a theoretical framework, which shared the basic premise of adult education, postulating that adults should have control over the content and form of their education. He drew upon Marxism, phenomenology[1] and existentialism[2], as well as other social science and philosophical tracts as a basis for formulating his now famous conscientisation method (La Belle, 1987). He was a critic of the authoritarian paradigm of teaching, in which the student was the depository of knowledge and the teacher the depositor. He also was a critic of positivism, in which Western-oriented researchers study an objective world, separate from the inter-subjective meanings as understood by the participants in their world. He instead believed that research on people must include both the people and their perceptions.

Freire's work on conscientisation reinforced the notion that socially marginalised people could be involved in the production of knowledge. His dialogic approach to adult education engaged individuals in critical analysis and organised action to improve their

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[1] *Phenomenology is the study of "phenomena": appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience*

[2] *Existentialism is a philosophical theory or approach, which emphasizes the existence of the individual person, as a free and responsible agent determining their own development through acts of the will.*

situations. In these dialogues, educators and "students" moved toward a critical consciousness of the forces of oppression and the possibilities for liberation. Freire believed in the power of education as a political tool, for raising the consciousness of oppressed people at both the local and global levels. His book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) evolved from his experience in adult literacy work in Brazil. His work on Thematic Investigation (1973), first in Brazil and later in Chile, served as a basis for a theoretical and practical model for participatory research and inspired scholars and activists to get together with community residents to research, educate and plan for sustainable, community-controlled social change projects, in which the central role was that of learning through investigation. Many grassroots social movements have used this approach since the 1960s.

2.1.2 International Adult Education Movements

By the late 1950s and the early 1960s, the dominant international research paradigm reflected North American and European models of research. As described in Unit1, this dominant paradigm deriving from empiricism and positivism emphasised rigorous attention to instrument construction, as well as statistical precision and replication.

Adult educators located in countries in the geographic South — particularly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America critiqued the claims of orthodox positivist research to value-free, impartial research. Adult educators trained as professionals, engaged themselves in systematic research, particularly around the outcomes of their interventions and began to face the contradictions that were rooted in their training as researchers.

As professionally trained researchers they began to distance themselves from the learners, established one-way control (in their hands) over the research process and carried out research in a manner that had no impact on the learner.

This contradiction began to result in the reformulation of both the theory and practice of a view of research, which was sympathetic to and congruent with the premises on which the adult education philosophy was rooted.

While, adult education philosophy emphasised on a learner centric approach, the adult educators had to adopt a research centric approach in understanding the programme content, as well as educational methods. When they came to the field to implement the research, they found that they needed to "de-learn in order to learn". This dichotomy between two roles led the adult educators to question their roles as researchers. They discovered a contradiction between the processes they now worked with as critical educators, and those with which they carried out research activities, the latter drawing on orthodox, top-down research methodologies. These adult educators realised that the rise of specialisation, and professional expertise had led to the devaluation of both popular knowledge and alternative systems of knowledge production.

Control over knowledge production systems was thus being used by the development elite to preserve the status quo and make people dependent on the government and the elite section of society for all resources and services, including knowledge. Thus, began the search for an alternative research paradigm, which was learner centric and required popular community mobilisation (Pant & Thekkudan, 2007).

 For example, during the early 1970s, young social scientists of the First World working as aid specialists in Tanzania became frustrated with the rigidity of the Western social science methods in the African setting. These methods were based on rigid empiricism and positivism, obsessed with instrument construction and rigor, defined by statistical precision and replication. The scientists found that teams of students and village workers, who were studying problems such as unemployment among youth and the socio-economic causes of malnutrition, were far more effective in eliciting the information that was required from the people than they, the scientists, had been. They attributed this success to the data collection methods that relied on the more communal sharing of knowledge specific to the local culture (Bacon, 2003). Budd Hall's reflections in the Note Bank below corroborate the above reasoning.

NOTE BANK:

…One of my first tasks for the Institute was to do a survey of adult education needs for the Ministry of Adult Education, which was setting up new programmes in all of the districts. In brief I found that the survey approach which I had used did not produce any useful results. In fact I found that I learned more about what rural Tanzanians were interested in learning by sitting several evenings just listening to stories in the village bar, than I had through a more seemingly scientific approach. And while I did not 'see the light' at any single moment, the accumulation of experiences and influences gradually led me like many others to thinking about knowledge and knowledge creation in new ways…

(Hall, 2005)

The work of Marja Liisa Swantz in Africa was another early influence. At the Tanzanian Bureau of Resource Allocation and Land Use Planning (BRALUP) of the University of Dar es Salaam, Marja-Liisa Swantz and teams of students and village workers were initially involved in questions of youth and employment in the coastal region and later, in studies of socio-economic causes of malnutrition in the Central Kilimanjaro region. She noted that research strategies of developing countries such as Tanzania served only to reproduce a model that was tied to the Western domination of the newly emerging African nations. In planning research on a subject related to development it was important to answer questions like:

- Who are the beneficiaries of this research?
- What are the aims?
- Who is going to be involved?
- What approach and methods of research should be used so that the research would bring the greatest possible gains for development?

Marja Liisa Swantz opined, that both the researched and researcher could become agents of development and in the process both could change. Based on these insights, adult educators began to rely more and more on local knowledge for the technical solution of problems facing the people, who were encouraged to contribute their own experience, wisdom, and skills to the research. Through this practice they began to articulate the term "participant research". (Hall, 2005)

Similar practices were adopted to address social change in parts of Latin America and Asia, which were also experiencing the pains of struggle for liberation from foreign or dictatorial domination. Examples include a) Orlando Fals-Borda's work with peasants struggling for land in Colombia; b) people's struggles for protection against deforestation in India, and c) efforts to secure rights for farmer settlers in the southern Philippines (Bacon, 2003).

Critiques of positivistic research continued to surface and by the late 1970s, participatory research projects began to be pursued in northern regions of the world, including Switzerland, Canada, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Italy, and the United States in various disciplines of public health, sociology, anthropology, community psychology, and community development.

NOTE BANK:

Several examples of participatory and action-oriented research traditions in Europe and North America are listed below:

- In Switzerland, researchers in curriculum development adopted methodologies from political research to suit their needs.

- In Canada, methods of evaluation were developed along action research lines, for community development work

- In Italy, Paolo Orefice and colleagues at the University of Naples applied the methodology to their investigation of community and district "awareness" of power and control.

- In the USA, the Highlander Centre in Tennessee used participatory research approaches to deal with issues of land ownership and use.

2.2 The Participatory Research Network

The publication of the special issue of the journal 'Convergence' in 1975 was a turning point when the work of practitioners, scholars, and activists and many grassroots research processes were published. It is here the term participatory research was first coined (Etmanski & Pant, 2007). Individuals from this group of practitioners, scholars, and activists subsequently formed the Participatory Research Network. The network was composed of autonomous and geographically based groups working or interested in participatory research. There were five nodes in the network: North America (Toronto-Budd Hall), Asia (New Delhi-Rajesh Tandon), Africa (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania-Yusuf Kassam), Europe (Netherlands -Jan de Vries), Latin America (Caracas, Venezuela-Francisco Vio Grossi). The network became a means by which the ideas and practices of PR became more widely visible. A series of meetings were organised to

a)   increase the awareness of the concept of PR

b)   to support others who were using PR

c)   to deepen the understanding of PR work and

d)   to demonstrate to people in various locations that PR had world resonance and relevance

e)   To show that people wanted to use PR to change the power relations.

In 1976, the first regional network of PR began, under the leadership of Budd Hall. The International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) and its national and regional member organisations throughout the world encouraged and supported the network (Hall, 2005).

The Participatory Research Network wrote of 'Breaking the Academic Monopoly' on knowledge creation and drew their inspiration from the ideas of Nyerere, Freire, Gandhi and Myles Horton. In their initial attempts, there was a strong emphasis on the need to 'return us to roots'. It was based more on a critique of the dominant research, as well as a critique of the attempt to import natural sciences tools to social sciences. It was

increasingly felt, that most current forms of social science research were not adequately addressing the political implications of people's participation in development. As the controversial aspects were too often ignored, it was difficult for such research to contribute to any sustainable solution.

Participatory research heightened people's awareness about conflicts and contradictions existing in their situations and the ways to overcome them. They supported grassroots initiatives by women and men from the marginalised communities, to create knowledge about their own problems and share these ideas with others in similar situations (Pant & Thekkudan, 2007).

NOTE BANK:

The network summarised the characteristics of participatory research as an integrated activity that combines social investigation, educational work, and action. Some of the characteristics of the process include:

- The political [impetus] originates in the community or workplace itself
- The ultimate goal is fundamental structural transformation and the improvement of the lives of those involved
- The workplace or community is involved in the control of the entire process
- The awareness in the people of their own abilities and resources is strengthened and mobilising or organising is supported
- The term "researcher" can refer to both the community or workplace persons involved, as well as those with specialised training
- Outside researchers as committed participants and learners in a process that leads to militancy rather than detachment

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2. 2.1 Participatory Action Research

Participatory action research is a phrase that emerged independently within both the *Northern and Southern Traditions* and is characterised by research, educational work, and social action. Orlando Fals-Borda, a Colombian sociologist, and many of his colleagues in Colombia and elsewhere in Latin America had made decisions to use their intellectual skills and connections to strengthen the political movements associated with revolution and democracy of the time. Fals-Borda aimed to legitimise "popular knowledge" and develop a "science of the proletariat" with which the masses could

conduct their own struggle for social transformation. Fals-Borda effectively incorporated the "Community Action" component into the research plans of many traditionally trained researchers, which was based on his research with peasant and other underserved groups, in rural Boyacá.

It was only then that communities started to fully appreciate the benefits of this approach, which had initially seemed too abstract for many. He preferred the use of the term action research at the time, but some time later, perhaps through interaction with the Latin American network of participatory research, he began to refer to this kind of work as 'participatory action research'. He coined this specific phrase to include the three specific characteristics of

- research
- educational work and
- Social action.

It was Fals-Borda who gave 'participatory action research' worldwide recognition in the Cartagena Conference on Action Research in Cartagena, Colombia.

THINK TANK

What do you think have been the major issues raised by adult education movements in your country/community/region? Has this empowered the people? How?

2.2.2 Participation in Development Programmes

Participatory research also drew strength from debates around participation in international development programmes. As the newly independent nations began to deliver development programmes to their people, two trends began to emerge by the early 1970s.

First, a blind reliance on theory, models and experts was displacing the knowledge and experience of those "being developed".

Second, the process of "delivery" was displacing a sense of "ownership" of local communities with governmental control and supervision.

The development paradigm raised the question of people's participation and of people being central actors in their own development. The fundamental tenet in the promotion of participation as a central concept in development is the requirement for using the knowledge and skills of those who are critical participants and central actors in the development process (Chambers, 1983).

Participatory development approaches and methodologies began to be evolved in field practices of programmes and projects around the world in the late 1970s and in the decade of 1980s. There has also been a growing recognition of the validity of popular and indigenous knowledge and a rising international commitment to community members' participation in development and evaluation initiatives. There has been increasing pressure from policy makers, development managers, and civil society groups to keep people at the centre of development initiatives and thought.

2. 3 Feminist and Anti-Racist Movements

Feminists have specifically emphasised a need to work with people in a way that empowers them. Callaway (1981) demonstrates that women have been largely excluded from producing the dominant forms of knowledge. She argues that the social sciences have not only been a science of male society, but also a male science of society.

Jackson & Kassam (1998) reiterate this point by claiming that "women are systematically excluded in most societies from knowledge-production processes that are dominated by men—even ones that claim to be participatory". The continued refusal to see 'mother work' as work and 'feminine' qualities as valuable, both in the home and in the workplace, has perpetuated the gendered and racial division of labour that devalues women. These social norms can be linked to a structural increase in poverty among women, since poor mothers (often single) become dependent on welfare, or are forced to seek employment in low paying industries. Concealing the economic importance of the work done mostly by women, also feeds into the predominant Western masculine dichotomies, whether they are Marxist or mainstream. These are the binary oppositions between 'family' and 'work', between 'private' and 'public', and between the 'reproductive' and the 'productive' and feminists even consider child care a form of 'chore'. (Hart, 1995) In relation to this fact, it is important that women learn to create their own knowledge. Participatory research is one avenue for this to occur.

The feminist and anti-racist perspective starts from the understanding that both gender and race are basic organising principles in shaping each individual's consciousness and developing skills and abilities in the existent social structures and institutions. It argues for a need to begin with a social analysis that acknowledges the multi-directional nature of power relations and articulating systems of oppression. Issues of power and voice within the research are highlighted. Questions regarding the relationship between the researcher and the researched are highlighted, as is the question of whose voice(s) the research (re)presents.

It is concerned with empowerment and/or emancipation of those marginalised by society, or in a particular sphere of society. It is avowedly and clearly political in intent and in process (Brown & Strega, 2005).

Research must be about empowering the marginalised and promoting action against inequities.

Feminist and anti-racist PR can be used as a means of consciousness-raising and empowerment for community organisation and development, as well as a tool for women to analyse reproduction, reproductive rights, and women's health in the context of their own lives.

THINK TANK:

What, in your opinion, is the most important historical influence in the growth of participatory research?

Summary

In this Unit we have described the Northern and Southern Traditions. We understood the ways action research as *Northern Tradition* laid the foundation of PR. We comprehended the trends in *Southern tradition* viz. the International Adult Education Movements, Participatory Research Network, and Participatory Action Research. We became familiar with debates on participation in development programmes. We understood the worldview of feminist and anti-racist movements.

Required Reading

Tandon Rajesh (Ed) 2005, *Participatory Research, Revisiting the Roots*, New Delhi, Mosaic Books

Chapter 5: Ideology and Political Economy in Inquiry: Participatory Research by David L. Brown and Rajesh Tandon

Chapter 7: Reflections of a Feminist Political Scientist on Attempting Participatory Research in Aotearoa by Delle Small

Chapter10:Issues and Experiences in Participatory Research in Asia by Rajesh Tandon

Chapter 17: The Methodology of Participatory Approach by Deborah Bryceson, Linzi Manicom and Yusuf Kassam

Chapter 19: Social Transformation and Participatory Research by Rajesh Tandon

Recommended for Further Reading

Maguire, P. 1987, Adjusting the Lens: Participatory Research. In P. Maguire, *Doing participatory research: A feminist approach* (pp. 34-57). Amherst, MA: Centre for International Education

Oakley, P. 1991, Understanding participation. In, *Projects with people: The practice of participation in rural development* (pp. 239-268). Geneva: International Labour Office

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Etmanski Catherine & Pant Mandakini, 2007, "Teaching Participatory Research through Reflexivity and Relationships: Reflections on an International Collaborative Curriculum Project between the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) and the University of Victoria (U.Vic.)," in *Action Research,* Vol. 5, Issue 3. September. pp 275-291

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La Belle, T. J. 1987 `From Consciousness Raising to Popular Education in Latin America and the Caribbean' in *Comparative Education Review*, 31, pp 201-217.

Pant Mandakini & Thekkudan Julie. 2007. 'Practice research Engagement: Mobilizing Community Knowledge.' In Rajesh Tandon (Ed) Citizen Participation: Future of Governance. New Delhi. PRIA.

Wallerstein Nina & Duran Bonnie. 2003. 'The Theoretical, Historical, and Practice Roots of CBPR and Related Participatory Traditions', in Meredith Minkler and Nina Wallerstein (Ed) *Community-Based Participatory Research for Health: From Process to Outcomes*. San Francisco, CA. Jossey Bass.