Decolonising methodologies: The possibilities of interactive, participatory and emancipatory methods

Professor Sharlene Swartz
2 May 2017

Social science that makes a difference

HSRC
Human Sciences
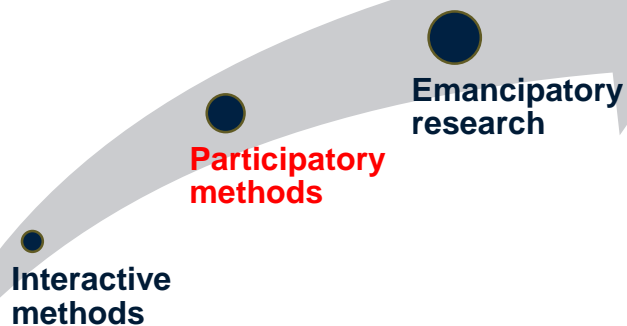Research Council

---

Outline

1. Interaction, Participation, Emancipation

2. Case studies
   - Ready or not: Race, education and emancipation in South African universities
   - *Teenage Tata: Opportunities for emancipation through social network interviewing*
   - *Old enough to know: Using participatory methods as a process for change*

3. Social network interviewing as emancipatory practice

HSRC
Human Sciences
Research Council

Interaction, Participation, Emancipation

Emancipatory research

Participatory methods

Interactive methods

HSRC
Human Sciences
Research Council

Interactive research

1. Photoelecitation
2. Photovoice
3. Mini videos – current and desired
4. Voting
5. Life story drawings
6. Community mapping
7. Sentence completion
8. Rank order activities – circle of influence
9. Mind maps
10. Interactive assessment activity
11. Dialogues
12. …

HSRC
Human Sciences
Research Council

Participatory research

- "Recognizes the value of engaging in the research process those who are intended to be the beneficiaries, users and stakeholders of research" (Biggs)

- **Key feature: location of power,** ccommitment to the democratisation & demystification of scientific research

- Community members as **knowledgeable collaborators**

- **Underlying values:** action-oriented, dialogue, relevant and iterative, justice (Kurt Lewin - the "Northern Tradition")

- **Core elements:** Mutual respect and trust, accountability and reflexivity

- **Biggs' modes of participation:** Contractual, Consultative, Collaborative and Collegiate

HSRC
Human Sciences
Research Council

Emancipatory research

- What do you know, what do you want to know?

- **A feminist approach – to dissolve the "the knower-known" dichotomy**

- To counter exploitative research, **transfer of technology from the developed countries to poorer nations, "**the imbalance of benefit' (Baker, Lynch et al)

- Part of a radical social agenda of equality (Paolo Freire - the "Southern Tradition")

- Critical **to the poor and the voiceless, aims for s**elf-determination and **sovereignty, transference of research ownership**

HSRC
Human Sciences
Research Council

Paulo Freire on Emancipation

- Advocated 'conscientisation' and 'dialogue' among the 'poor and oppressed' about the conditions of oppression, to be able to 'name their world' (Freire, 1972, p. 61)
- To 'perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform' (p. 25-6).
- Using 'problem-posing' rather than 'bank-deposit' methods
- So that 'men and women [are able to] deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world' (Richard Shaull, Foreword to Freire, 1972, p. 13-4).

HSRC Human Sciences Research Council

Challenges of emancipatory research

1. Time consuming
2. Internal validity – iterative nature
3. Sustaining participation
4. Uncertain outcomes
5. Who is included, who excluded, who decides?
6. Dependence on local stakeholders
7. Unintended consequences of participation
8. Money issues (e.g. funding, and paying for research)
9. Ownership of knowledge

HSRC Human Sciences Research Council

Participation or emancipation?

Participation	Emancipation
Consultation about topic	Topic chosen
Joint planning of design	Design initiated
Member checks	Empowerment to self produce
Joint presentations	???
Co-authorship	Relinquishing of ownership

HSRC Human Sciences Research Council

An emancipatory framework

1. How has the chosen research activities allowed participant's voices to be heard **polyphonically**?
2. Is there evidence of **transparency and self-reflection** to make clear the researcher's politics of involvement?
3. How have I attempted to develop **mutuality, respect and trust** in order to **diminish inherent power** differences?
4. How have decisions about **language and representation** contributed to or prevented a 'colonizing discourse'?
5. What commitments have I made to '**research-as-intervention**' amongst vulnerable groups in this study?
6. In what way has this research been **emancipatory** rather than dominating and oppressive?

HSRC Human Sciences Research Council

Ready or Not: Race, education and emancipation in SA universities

Interaction
- Photovoice
- Facebook blogs

Participation
- Annual interviews over 5 years
- Reflection on methods

Emancipation
- Social networking interviews
- Final reflection
- Auto-ethnographic documentary
- Research as intervention

HSRC
Human Sciences
Research Council

Social network interviewing

Choose from among these people to interview:

1. A person from your home town who never went to university
2. A student like you
3. A student you consider more privileged than you
4. A student you consider less privileged than you
5. A staff contact from your previous school
6. A person in a university leadership position
7. A recent graduate that you know
8. A person who works at student support services
9. A student who dropped out of university this past year
10. A person you consider to have helped you get to varsity
11. A person you consider to have helped you over this last year of university
12. A family member who has been to university

HSRC
Human Sciences
Research Council

Social network interviewing

Ask these questions (and why):

Many students struggle to both enrol at and successfully complete university. This research study aims to find out why this is so and what could be done about it.	Opening Declarative Statement
Question	**Aims**
1. Why is it important for young South Africans to succeed at university? 2. In your opinion, what are some of the struggles facing university students in South Africa, and what are some of the reasons for these struggles?	*Ice breaker, building a discussion about community and norms*

HSRC Human Sciences Research Council

Social network interviewing

Ask these questions (and why):

3. In your opinion, what affects someone's success at university? 4. Who is responsible for students succeeding at University?	*Evaluating social context and external agency – what can and cannot be changed.*
5. From what you know of me (or students in general), what do I do that stops (sabotages) me from succeeding at varsity? What should I be doing? 6. How does racism and gender discrimination affect student's lives? 7. How is success at university affected by people's backgrounds? (Prompt: gender, education, race, social class)	*Inviting constructive analysis, specifically with regard to internal agency.* *Talking about peer and/or gendered norms. Inviting analysis of behaviours*

HSRC Human Sciences Research Council

Social network interviewing

Ask these questions (and why):

8. In your opinion, who should be helping students succeed at university, and what should they be doing to help? 9. What steps have you taken (or are you taking) in order to be successful in your life?	*Developing strategies*
10. Who else should I talk to that might be able to help me to be successful at university?	*Referral to enlarge social connections*

HSRC
Human Sciences
Research Council

3 Case studies – Emancipatory ethics?

	READY OR NOT	TEENAGE TATA	OLD ENOUGH
Choosing appropriate research activities (interactive methods)	✓	✓	✓
Deliberately building relationships with research participants	✓	✗	✓
Conveying researcher subjectivity	✓	✗	✗
Developing mutuality and flattening the power gradient	✓	✓	✗
Considering how language is used and representations are made	✓	✓	✓
Planning 'research-as-intervention'.	✓	✓	✓

HSRC
Human Sciences
Research Council

3 Case studies – Emancipation?

	READY OR NOT	TEENAGE TATA	OLD ENOUGH
Interaction	✓	✓	✓
Participation	✓	✓	✓
Emancipation	?	?	✗
Agents – deciding on the 'problem' of their choosing	✗	✗	✗
Providing the space to continue the process of agency, and self-emancipation	✓	✓	✗
Ownership	✗	✗	✗

HSRC
Human Sciences
Research Council

Some possibilities

Interaction
Starting goal

Participation
A second tier aim

Emancipation
Ultimate
objective

HSRC
Human Sciences
Research Council

9

Concluding questions

1. What will it take to invite participants to set their own research agendas?

2. What is needed to create a space for self-emancipation after the research process is over?

Interaction
Starting goal

Participation
A second tier aim

Emancipation
Ultimate
objective

HSRC
Human Sciences
Research Council
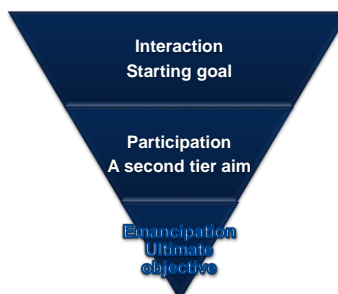
Works Cited

Baker, Lynch and Cantillion. 2007. Equality: From theory to action. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Biggs. 1989. Resource-poor farmer participation in research: a synthesis of experiences from nine national agricultural research systems. *OFCOR Comparative Study Paper 3* International Service for National Agricultural Research, The Hague.

Freire. 1978. Education for Critical Consciousness. New York: Seabury Press.

Swartz. 2011. 'Going deep' and 'giving back': Strategies for exceeding ethical expectations when researching amongst vulnerable youth. Qual Research, 11(1) 47–68

Swartz, S., Mahali, A., Arogundade, E., Khalema, E. S., Rule, C., Cooper, A. Molefi, and Naidoo, P. 2017. Ready or Not! Race, Education and Emancipation: A five-year longitudinal, qualitative study of agency and impasses to success amongst higher education students in a sample of South African universities. Report submitted to the Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity, University of KwaZulu-Natal/Department of Higher Education and Training.

HSRC
Human Sciences
Research Council