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

Professor Sharlene Swartz
2 May 2017
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
Interactive research

1. Photoelicitation
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. …
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, commitment 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
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 self-determination and sovereignty, transference of research ownership
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).
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
## Participation or emancipation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Emancipation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consultation about topic</td>
<td>Topic chosen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint planning of design</td>
<td>Design initiated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member checks</td>
<td>Empowerment to self produce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint presentations</td>
<td>???</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-authorship</td>
<td>Relinquishing of ownership</td>
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</table>
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?
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
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
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Aims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Why is it important for young South Africans to succeed at university?</td>
<td>Ice breaker, building a discussion about community and norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Social network interviewing

**Ask these questions (and why):**

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

## Ask these questions (and why):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strategy/Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. In your opinion, who should be helping students succeed at university, and what should they be doing to help?</td>
<td>Developing strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. What steps have you taken (or are you taking) in order to be successful in your life?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Who else should I talk to that might be able to help me to be successful at university?</td>
<td>Referral to enlarge social connections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## 3 Case studies – Emancipatory ethics?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>READY OR NOT</th>
<th>TEENAGE TATA</th>
<th>OLD ENOUGH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choosing appropriate research activities (interactive methods)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliberately building relationships with research participants</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conveying researcher subjectivity</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing mutuality and flattening the power gradient</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considering how language is used and representations are made</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning ‘research-as-intervention’.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 3 Case studies – Emancipation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>READY OR NOT</th>
<th>TEENAGE TATA</th>
<th>OLD ENOUGH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emancipation</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agents – deciding on the ‘problem’ of their choosing</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing the space to continue the process of agency, and self-emancipation</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
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</table>
Some possibilities

Interaction
Starting goal
Participation
A second tier aim
Emancipation
Ultimate objective
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?


