INVOLVING YOUTH IN RESEARCH

**A Guide to the Literature on
Participatory Research with Youth**
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June 2010

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Citation: Ollner, A. (2010) A Guide to the Literature on Participatory Research with Youth. The Assets Coming Together For Youth Project

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Innovative/Arts-based Methods

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Civic Participation / Social Action

Critical Perspectives on Engaging Youth in Research

Introduction

Overview

This guide was produced as a practical tool for the ACT for Youth project. It contains summaries of articles on research that has engaged with youth as active participants, and focuses on elements that could be useful for the ACT for Youth project.

The articles included were found through two searches in CSA Social Services Abstracts and Web of Science. Search terms were "youth" or "young," "participation" or "participatory" or "action," and "research." The articles within this guide were selected based on the level of participation of youth within the research process; articles describing research in which youth participation consisted of being interviewed were not included.

Articles were also chosen when they used innovative or arts-based methods or approaches, so as to provide some inspiration for the upcoming work in ACT for Youth. The articles cover a variety of fields and are not limited to research focused on positive youth development. Relevant articles from research in the global South have also been included.

ACT for Youth Project

The Assets Coming Together for Youth Project (ACT for Youth) is a five-year community-university research partnership that is focused on developing a comprehensive youth strategy that will outline how urban communities like the Jane-Finch community can build assets for youth. Community consultations in Jane-Finch have consistently identified the need for a comprehensive youth development strategy that will include creative programs to engage youth and promote community development. Similarly, a United Way report released in January 2008 documented the absence of a coherent youth strategy in Ontario and called for a comprehensive strategy for youth. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services recently took up this challenge and has launched a process to develop an Ontarian youth strategy by 2011. ACT for Youth is a partnership of community stakeholders (majority of who provide services in the Jane-Finch community) and academic researchers. (including eight professors from York University).

ACT for Youth draws from the positive youth development perspective that promotes youth assets rather than focusing on youth problems. ACT for Youth integrates the positive youth development perspective with a social justice approach that recognizes that youth in 'marginalized' urban communities experience barriers such as racism, sexism, poverty, zero-tolerance and unemployment that are 'toxic' to their well-being. The ACT for Youth project believes that youth can be "knowledge producers" and not simply "sources of data". The project has created paid opportunities for youth to be involved in the project. For example, eight youth from the Jane-Finch community are currently completing paid research internships with the project. The project is mainly concerned with five questions:

- What is the resources and assets profile of youth in urban communities?

- What are the perspectives of these youth on issues of concern to them?

- What are their employment and educational experiences?

- How can we change the negative public discourse about youth in Jane-Finch community?

- How can we build community-university partnerships that can support these youth?

For more information, please visit

http://www.yorku.ca/act/

How to use this guide

Each article summary contains the following sections:

- Citation

- Abstract

- Categories

- Level of youth participation

- Values and approach, Evaluation,

- Method, Challenges/Enablers

- Lessons learned.

The summaries are organized in alphabetical order according to the first author's name.

The categories are themes that emerged after the summaries were completed. Each article summary lists the categories into which the article fall. The categories are:

- Innovative/arts-based methods

- Youth as co-researchers – high levels of youth participation

- Focus on empowerment

- Youth participation in evaluation of youth services

- Youth in communities,

- Civic participation/social action

- Critical perspectives on engaging youth in research.

An Appendix at the end of this guide lists all of the articles in each category.

The Level of participation section describes how and whether youth were involved in each stage of the process; this varies across articles, with limited youth participation all the way to youth as full co-researchers.

The Values and approach section describes the values that can be identified in the article and how they are understood, and, if mentioned, the conception of the participatory approach used. The Evaluation section discusses if and how each research project was evaluated. The Methods, Challenges/Enablers and Lessons learned sections include elements that may be useful for ACT for Youth.

Categories

◇ Innovative/arts-based methods

◇ Youth as co-researchers – high levels of youth participation

Abstract

This article provides a detailed description of the in-field experience of using community mapping as a participatory action research tool with youth. It describes a case study, the Youth Friendly Health Services project (YFHS project), in which a team of Vancouver youth carried out a participatory evaluation of health clinics by mapping out criteria for evaluation & then creating an evaluation tool based on the maps that were created. Community mapping proved to be an inclusive & appropriate tool to engage youth perspectives. The major challenges faced in the process were in determining how to represent & act upon the findings of the mapping process. Their experience suggests that while such innovative data collection tools such as community mapping can successfully engage youth, not just as participants, but as facilitators of research, they must be accompanied by equally creative & innovative approaches to formulating research results & outcomes.

Level of youth participation

Youth did not initiate the project, and the adult researchers defined the research questions and the data collection method – community mapping. However, once youth were recruited they were given decision-making power and were involved in the research from data collection through to research dissemination. Youth acted as researchers, and there was also a youth advisory committee.

Values and approach

• Empowerment (of citizens to address the issues they face)

• Assets (moving away from a focus on the removal of risks and barriers to participation towards a focus on human development initiatives; desire to mobilize the assets of youth)

• Action for social change (they intended to use the findings to influence health service provision for youth, but this did not end up happening due to some logistical constraints)

• Participatory Action Research approach, described as: approach through which community is empowered to form their own questions, lead the research process, and create their own solutions

Evaluation

Not described here.

Useful for ACT

Method

Community mapping: The form of community mapping they used was "visual and relational data-gathering technique that can be used to document not just geographical, but also other forms of abstract data." The map starts out as a blank sheet of paper, and the youth were able to use words, numbers and images. It allows for story-telling and, when done in a group, a "snapshot of the community as the community sees it."

Data analysis: Representative youth from each of the four groups, along with members of the youth advisory committee, came together to isolate elements from each map by recreating them on sticky notes, and then sorting these into categories. At a later meeting, a smaller group analyzed the categories.

Action: Based on the information uncovered during the analysis, the youth along with the advisory committee co-created a survey to evaluate health services. The youth then visited some identified health services and completed the survey; some asked youth clients at these health services to complete surveys as well. When the survey results were analyzed, the youth felt that they did not capture the full "emotional and lived dimensions of those experiences" and decided to create a zine instead to reflect the findings.

Their description of a zine: "A self-published small booklet . . . made to express personal ideas and experiences, or [focus] on a specific topic such as: art, writing, travel, recipes, feminism, fashion, family, chocolate, or even pink chairs. A zine may have a stapled or hand sewn binding, and be of any length. Some people make zines for their own enjoyment and not profit, others create zines as a way of sharing their creativity and seek to at least cover their expenses." (Pink Chair Zine Library, 2005)

Their zine included photo-essays accompanied by numerical ratings of the health services.

Research dissemination: The youth researchers presented their results at a conference. It was intended that they would share the results with health care providers as well but it didn't end up happening.

Challenges/Enablers
Enablers in the mapping process:

- Establishing an atmosphere of trust – they worked with four youth groups who were already familiar with each other, and the first step was to establish ground rules.

- Creating an empowering space – continually emphasized the expert knowledge of the youth

- Setting a clear focus – provided some templates for the maps (i.e. a life timeline; a 3-D box representing a health service)

- Creating an open space – allowing for more unconventional means of expression (i.e. graffiti writing)

- Encouraging collaboration – encouraging discussion during map-making made it into a more enjoyable process

Challenges in the data analysis process:

- Having the youth take charge of the coding process made it a bit slower and more complicated, due to disagreement among groups about which items would go into which category. However, this was an excellent learning exercise for the youth.

- Having allowed for a very creative map-making process, determining the meaning of some of the images and words was challenging – luckily the youth offered insight into the significance of the objects.

- Youth had assumptions that had not been adequately dispelled during the orientation: they did not believe that this was "real research" (-> lessons learned)

Lessons learned

- Make sure the youth who are participating understand the principles of PAR, and emphasize the validity of this type of research.

- Community mapping was an open, inclusive means of data collection.

- The choice to adopt a quantitative survey method of evaluation was made in the interests of time, but did not allow for the creative expression of the researchers – they recommend to not rush to easy quantitative methods, in spite of the temptation to do so.

- They separated the "participatory" and "action" aspects of PAR, so that they first concentrated on making the project participatory, then proceeded to concern themselves with how the results could be framed in such a way to do action. The researchers felt that this approach overlooked the possibility of praxis.

- They regret their narrow view of participation, in that they did not include health care providers in the research process. This could have, in fact, facilitated action.

Youth action research for prevention: A multi-level intervention designed to increase efficacy and empowerment among urban youth

Categories

◇ Focus on empowerment

◇ Civic participation/social action

Abstract

Youth Action Research for Prevention (YARP), a federally funded research and demonstration intervention, utilizes youth empowerment as the cornerstone of a multi-level intervention designed to reduce and/or delay onset of drug and sex risk, while increasing individual and collective efficacy and educational expectations. The intervention, located in Hartford Connecticut, served 114 African-Caribbean and Latino high school youth in a community education setting and a matched comparison group of 202 youth from 2001 to 2004. The strategy used in YARP begins with individuals, forges group identity and cohesion, trains youth as a group to use research to understand their community better (formative community ethnography), and then engages them in using the research for social action at multiple levels in community settings (policy, school-based, parental etc.) Engagement in community activism has, in turn, an effect on individual and collective efficacy and individual behavioral change. This approach is unique insofar as it differs from multilevel interventions that create approaches to attack multiple levels simultaneously. We describe the YARP intervention and employ qualitative and quantitative data from the quasi-experimental evaluation study design to assess the way in which the YARP approach empowered individual youth and groups of youth (youth networks) to engage in social action in their schools, communities and at the policy level, which in turn affected their attitudes and behaviors.

Level of youth participation

Youth received extensive training in research methods, and then conceived of and executed their own research projects and social actions, with the assistance of adult facilitators. It is important to note that the purpose of this study was actually to evaluate the benefits of doing research on the youth themselves (in terms of reducing/delaying onset of drug use and sex), as opposed to studying the experience of working with youth on research, or answering primary research questions with youth as co-researchers.

Values and approach

- Empowerment (focused on facilitated learning about social construction and transformation as a means for youth to understand their communities, imagine alternatives futures, and plan social action; hypothesis that group-conducted research for change, in conjunction with multilevel social change activities, strengthens "group cohesion and individual and collective efficacy")

- Draws on:

- ◇ Ecological theories (emphasis on multi-level research designs)
- ◇ Identity theories (learning about how perspectives about race and gender are socially constructed)
- ◇ Learning and instructional theories (assisting the youth to create peer groups with pro-social norms)
- ◇ Critical transformation theories (facilitating processes of becoming aware of the effects of oppressive structures, and of collective action so as to preserve a sense of hope and possibility)
- ◇ Participatory Action Research approach (not explicitly defined) – selected in order to have positive preventive impacts on individual, group and community levels.

Practicalities

- They did the study with 114 African-Caribbean and Latino high school youth between the ages of 14 and 16, and used a comparison group in order to evaluate outcomes.

- They mention hiring high school youth as youth researchers, but don't describe how this was structured into the project.

Evaluation

Note – the purpose of this project was to use youth participation in research as an intervention to benefit the youth and deter drug use and sex; therefore, the evaluation is partly designed to measure this outcome.

 "Outcomes at the individual level are measured using a quasi-experimental design (intervention group and matched comparison group) and a panel study with a pre-assessment and three follow-up assessments at the end of the summer, at mid year, and at 12 months (4 time points).

Outcomes at the group level are measured with network analytic techniques, group level measures gathered from individuals, and qualitative documentation of group formation and development throughout the intervention.

Outcomes at the community level are measured through qualitative documentation of advocacy and related actions, and their results over time." (p. 347)

Useful for ACT

Method

YARP is a 3-year summer and after school research and demonstration project. The ICR's Participatory Action Research Curriculum for Empowering Youth was used as a guide for the 7 weeks of training in the summer (four hours daily). Details of the curriculum are in the article, but this was essentially extensive training in research methods, as well as an examination of the socially constructed nature of identities and the raising of critical consciousness in terms of issues of power and assumptions.

Following the training were 8 months of action implementation and reflection (after-school program during the school year).

"Each YARP cohort discussed, and agreed upon a study topic related to adolescent risk behavior and conducted mixed methods research on that topic following the protocol outlined above during the summer. They then developed their collective action plans and programs, which were designed to change public norms and promote social advocacy around issues of concern to youth at the school, community and policy levels and to develop and promote positive youth action programs in schools and youth serving agencies, throughout the school year. Each project involved a set of actions, a team of organizational collaborators, and one or more target audiences. Steps involved reviewing the data, transforming the research model into a social action model by identifying social actions related to each predictor domain in their research model, and planning, conducting and reflecting on actions."

Each cohort's methods and actions

"Cohort 1 youth researched risky teen sex, using observations, interviews, pilesorts, and survey research."

"Cohort 2 youth studied teen dropouts, using interviewing, mapping, visual research, pile sorting, and surveys."

"Youth researcher-activists from Cohort 3 studied teen hustling, a term referring to selling items that were pirated, stolen, traded, or illegal. To test their model they collected data using a survey of youth, interviews with youth and adults including police and community agency representatives and visual research to construct a case study of a teen hustler in words and pictures." (p. 351)

Challenges

• Difficult to quantitatively measure small-scale community level change

Enablers

None described.

Lessons learned

• It was essential to have skilled adult facilitators throughout the project, especially facilitators who were skilled at helping the youth critically look at issues from multiple perspectives.

• Reflection activities allowed the youth to integrate abstract concepts from research into their everyday lives.

• The training component was not as effective as the research and action components in having positive outcomes on the youth in terms of their attitudes and behaviours.

Categories

◇ Innovative/arts-based methods

◇ Youth participation in evaluation of youth services

Abstract

People's health needs tend to be responded to by professionally led, individualistic & reactive services, rather than preventive interventions, or by drawing on lay expertise. In this project, we used a participatory approach to involve young people in researching their needs & views of how sources of support can be improved & developed. We present the background to the work undertaken; the participatory methods used; results & recommendations. The young people emphasized their preferences for informal support rather than counselling services; & changes in the attitudes of professionals towards young people, rather than major new service developments. We discuss the implications of a participatory approach to the research & to the individuals involved.

Level of youth participation

The project was initiated by a group of service providers serving youth. They wanted to allow for leadership of youth in driving the main research questions; however, the service provider committee had already decided on the method – focus groups – prior to engaging with youth.

Interestingly, different groups of youth were involved at each stage of the research, with no core group of youth participating throughout the project: a youth focus group was created to help guide research questions; other youth were involved as focus group participants, but not moderators; and three (other) youth volunteers assisted with data analysis. A group of three youth (unclear if it was the same who assisted with data analysis) gave comments on drafts of the report, and recommended dissemination through a conference. All youth focus group participants were then invited to plan the conference and present the findings.

The committee explicitly stated that they would attempt to avoid tokenism or manipulation of youth.

Values and approach

• Participatory Action Research approach, described as: involving maximum participation of stakeholders whose lives are affected by the problem being studied in the gathering of data and its analysis, with an objective of taking action for change

Practicalities

• Focus group participants were 12-25

• Intentions were to target the general youth population (rather than specific sub-populations) with an effort to include both rural and urban youth

• The three youth who volunteered to assist with data analysis were given a one-day training in qualitative research methods and were paid for their work

Evaluation

There seems to have been some evaluation done at the conference event. Youth were enthusiastic about the project and wanted to participate in something similar in the future. Youth workers were frustrated that the same messages kept coming out with no action being taken to change service provision. There was also some evaluation done at an evaluation meeting after the conference, to discuss the whole project.

Useful for ACT

Methods

A group of youth assisted with the formulation of research topics. The method of data collection was focus groups facilitated by the researcher. Recruitment for the focus groups was done through existing youth agencies. There was an awareness of the fact that this recruitment method would exclude youth who did not access these services.

Three youth from a local youth organization assisted the researcher with the data analysis. Youth also assisted with the preparation of the report, in a draft-reading capacity.

The youth who had assisted with the data analysis suggested a conference for disseminating the results. All youth who had participated in focus groups were invited to assist with planning the conference and presenting the data. The conference planning process included a weekend retreat, and some facilitation by two drama workers to assist with preparing the presentation of results – the research dissemination included the presentation of a theatre piece that reflected some of the findings.

Challenges in the focus groups

- When there were large differences in age between participants, younger participants tended to defer to older ones

- When groups were mixed-gender, there was greater difficulty discussing sensitive topics

Enablers in the focus groups:

- Having smaller groups (4-5 participants)

Challenges in the conference planning/execution process

It was difficult to coordinate youth from different parts of the county, and to engage a committed group of youth who were able to participate in the process from start to finish

Enablers in the conference planning/execution process

Bringing in two drama workers enabled the conference planning youth to focus their ideas and stimulate creativity

Challenges in general:

- Insufficient resources (money, staff, time) to enable a core group of youth to be involved with the project from start to finish

- Geographical distances (youth were from all over Northumberland county) were a barrier to youth coming together for meetings

- The length of time of the project (over a year) prevented youth from participating consistently – those who had participated in the focus groups were sometimes no longer accessing services at the youth agency where they had been recruited or had moved on to other interests, precluding them from becoming involved in the conference planning/execution process

- The location of the research initiators in the health fields meant that the research was necessarily focused on health-related issues, rather than on all the issues that were important to the youth

Enablers in general

- Allowing for flexibility in the project from the focus groups onwards allowed for youth to guide the process more (i.e. the decision to hold a conference, to hold a retreat, and the significant youth participation in the conference planning and results presentation)

- The involvement of youth made the research more credible and the language of the report more accessible

Lessons learned

- More support could have been provided to the youth who were planning and preparing the conference

- More financial support could have been provided to youth agencies in order to allow for greater youth attendance at the conference itself

- The structure of the project did not allow for youth to continue this work on their own

- Some youth at the final evaluation meeting said that the project had been too adult-focused in its language and structure, which had made it difficult at times to give input; the authors suggest that hosting the project at a youth agency would have reduced this barrier

- Involving youth in the data analysis process made it more time-consuming, but also made the results more valid.

Categories

◇ Youth as co-researchers – high levels of youth participation

◇ Focus on empowerment

Abstract

A team of 20 high school and college students with physical and/or health and orthopedic impairments was engaged in participatory action research (PAR) to systematically test strategies to solve problems they confronted in their daily lives. PAR goals were set by the participating youth with special health needs (YSHN) who were involved in every step of the research process from problem identification to dissemination of results. In the study reported here, all participants made progress in analyzing their personal needs, selecting a goal, and implementing a strategy to achieve the goal. In addition, the YSHN identified a common goal of visiting public venues, such as shopping malls, and conducted PAR projects to assess the accessibility of such venues. The results indicate that PAR is a viable method for involving YSHN with varied skills, limitations, and experiences to address personal issues as well as barriers they all confront. PAR appears to be a promising methodology for assisting YSHN in their quest for self-determination and the IDEA (1997) mandate to include adolescents in decision making.

Level of youth participation

Youth identified a problem, determined the research questions and methods, and collected and analyzed the results – they participated and led the process from start to finish, with the assistance of adult and younger adult facilitators. It should be noted that this article frames the research process primarily as a means to empower and build the independence of youth with special health needs; the results themselves and the taking of action based on the results were not emphasized as strongly. That being said, they do conclude that youth with special health needs are able to contribute meaningfully to research about their needs.

Values and approach

• Empowerment (the finding of solutions to everyday problems as being a means to increase the independence and self-determination of youth with special health needs)

• Participatory Action Research approach, described as: consumers of research using social science methods to test and find solutions to problems in their daily lives.

Practicalities

• Youth were recruited through health care providers

• Participants were ages 16-28

Evaluation

There appears to have been some evaluation of participants' experiences, with quotes from participants about the impact of the research project on their lives.

Useful for ACT

Methods

The group met twice monthly, with initial meetings including presentations on the basic principles and methodologies of social sciences.

In the first part of the project, participants each identified a particular problem in their daily life and tracked data related to that problem, thereby measuring their progress in achieving a personal goal or overcoming a personal barrier.

In the second part of the project, the youth worked as a group to conduct research on the accessibility of venues in the city (i.e. baseball stadium, shopping malls)

Challenges

- Parents sometimes served as barriers to greater youth independence through the project. This is attributed by the researchers to fear, low expectations, habit and/or family dynamics

Enablers

- The group structure provided a kind of support and shared experience that the youth had not been able to access elsewhere – it motivated the youth to take chances and set more challenging goals for themselves than they had done previously

Lessons learned

- The group structure provided unforeseen benefits to participants: it motivated them to collect data because they knew it would be shared at their next meeting, and it provided a kind of therapeutic support through the sharing of common experiences of discrimination that contributed to group bonding

- Youth who are often seen as dependent are able to contribute meaningfully to research about their own needs

Categories

◇ Critical perspectives on engaging youth in research

Abstract

Researchers argue that many young people are marginalized or excluded from today's consumer society and invisible to many official agencies and community services. Researchers have also more recently begun to extol the principles of involving young people in their work. Through liaison with one key support agency in the North East of England, six young people aged between 17 and 21 years who were not in employment, education or training were identified as willing to become involved and trained as co-researchers in an action research project to explore their invisibility. The young co-researchers resisted the original research plan and proposed methods, and instead established their own agenda. This alternative agenda demonstrated their considerable knowledge of and connections with People, Places and Money. The authors conclude, first, that far from being excluded, on the outside of social life, these young co-researchers were involved, informed and thoroughly engaged with it. Secondly, the researchers questioned the ethical implications of involving the young people as co-researchers. The significance of these issues for future research is discussed.

Level of youth participation

It was intended that youth would be recruited and trained to be co-researchers, and that they would be involved in decision-making through each stage of the research process. However, the project never went beyond the planning stage.

Values and approach

- Participation (inclusion of a marginalized group in the generation of knowledge about that group)

- Empowerment (research as a transformational process for the youth that encompasses non-hierarchical relationships and mutual learning, and an acknowledgement of the value of their lived experience)

- Social justice (they name social justice as driving the project but to not define what it means to them or how it is being applied)

Practicalities

- Youth were paid for each element of the project, and "inducements" such as digital media and training were used (note: the researchers began to feel that these elements contributed to an exploitative relationship with the youth rather than an empowering one)

Evaluation

none.

Useful for ACT

Methods

Not really useful. 3 youth were recruited and the project never got beyond the planning phase. The youth became the source of data as opposed to co-researchers as had been originally intended. It is unclear why the project did not proceed beyond planning.

Challenges

- Limited numbers

- Seeming lack of structure and facilitation in the process.

Enablers

None described.

Lessons learned

- Ethical issues of involving youth in research

- Will participating benefit them as individuals or as a group?

- Do using inducements such as payment and training lead to exploitation rather than empowerment?

- They came to the conclusion that young people should not be engaged in research unless they themselves are commissioning the researchers, and unless the researchers are willing to follow their agenda; otherwise the process will be inherently exploitative.

Checkoway, B., Richards-Schuster, K., Abdullah, S., Aragon, M., Facio, E., Figueroa, L., Reddy, E., Welsh, M., & White, A. (2003).
Young people as competent citizens.
Community Development Journal, 38(4), 298-309.

AND

Checkoway, B., & Richards-Schuster, K. (2003).
Youth participation in community evaluation research.
American Journal of Evaluation, 24(1), 21-33.

Categories

◇ Youth in communities

◇ Civic participation/social action

Abstract

Young people are competent citizens who can create community change, but the media often emphasize troubled youth & the services they require. This paper reports on a national effort to increase youth participation in community-based organizations in the US. It provides cross-site analysis of their issues & strategies, the impacts of participation, & the factors that facilitate & limit the process. It concludes with observations about the changing context of youth participation & the participatory community-based research methods needed to increase its understanding.

Abstract

Should young people participate in community evaluation research and, if so, what roles should they play? We believe that youth participation is desirable, but that it remains relatively undeveloped as a field of practice or subject of study. For this reason, this paper provides perspective on the increasing involvement by young people, identifies the participation patterns and evaluation roles of young people, and draws conclusions from empirically-based practice. It draws on the available literature, including our own participatory evaluation of a project intended to increase youth participation in organizational development and community change.

Level of youth participation

Youth and adults allies are engaged through six community-based organizations to participate in evaluation research and action in their community. Youth-adult evaluation committees are formed that form questions, gather information using surveys, interviews, focus groups and other evaluation instruments, and meet to reflect on their effectiveness. This process is facilitated by a community evaluator. There is little explicit explanation of the youth-adult dynamics on the committees, or of which roles are taken by youth and which by adults; the researchers tend more towards general statements about obstacles to youth participation.

Values and approach

• Participation (active, not passive or tokenistic, participation of youth in creating community change)

• Assets (their starting point is the view that youth are competent citizens who are able to meaningfully participate in their communities; they explicitly reject the tendency of social sciences, the media and professional practices to pathologize youth)

• Inclusion (youth as having a right and responsibility to participate in/ serve their communities; one outcome highlighted is an increase in social connectedness)

- Action for social change (focus is on how youth organize grassroots campaigns and raise awareness in order to influence policy and attitudes in their communities)

Practicalities

- This project focuses on youth ages 15 to 21.

Evaluation

"LNV is evaluated by a participatory process which involves youth and adults in documenting their activities, assessing their experiences, and using their learning for improving their effectiveness. Each organization has a community-based evaluator who works with an evaluation committee of youth and adults to facilitate the process. National evaluators analyse the activities across all sites, and assess the project in terms of its overall objectives." (Young people as competent citizens, pp. 300-301)

These are interim reports on the project, as it is not yet complete.

Useful for ACT

Methods

"Lifting New Voices is a national demonstration project designed to increase the participation of young people 15 to 21-years-old in organizational development and creating community

change… Six community-based organizations in low-income areas were selected for participation in the project. Each organization formulated a plan, formed a steering committee, hired a youth organizer and established a structure for implementation. Each organization has opportunities for training and technical assistance, cross-site meetings and national networking designed to support its involvement." (Young people as competent citizens, p. 300)

Details of each involved community's research and action project are not included. The focus appears to be much more on community organization and activism than on the research component.

Challenges

- Youth perceptions of themselves as unable to make change and are uncertain of how to proceed when they do have ideas; may accept disempowering assertion of adult authority

- Organizations are not always able/ ready to accept youth as competent citizens; they may not have the capacity or structures available to support youth in this role

- Communities that have been marginalized withdraw from participation

- Adults who work with youth in the research/action process can serve as obstacles to the youth if they have "adultist" attitudes and assumptions

Enablers

- Youth leaders

- Adult allies (recognize youth as resources, deal with bureaucracies, rally other adults)

- Youth or adults who act as "bridging people" – they enable communication between youth and adults, and are able to communicate across linguistic/ cultural boundaries

Lessons learned

In the LNV project:

- Youth willingly participate in all aspects of community evaluation research

- The research process has psychosocial benefits on youth, as well as increasing their skills and their interest in research

- Youth use evaluation research for social action

The second article includes a literature review of youth roles in research:

- Youth as subjects (youth are not included in any aspect of the research process, other than as subjects)

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- Youth as consultants (youth are engaged to improve the research tools to make them more youth-friendly – in this capacity they are respected as experts of their age group)

- Youth as partners (youth are partners with adults in research, with either equal or unequal levels of power in relation to their adult counterparts)

- Youth as directors (youth initiate their own research project)

Research gaps identified

- What are the major models and methods of participation?

- What are the short- and long-term impacts at the individual, organizational, and community levels?

- What are the factors which facilitate and limit effective practice?

- Are there evaluation research methods which are age-appropriate and culturally-sensitive and, if so, what are they?

- What types of knowledge and skills are needed by youth participants and adult allies?

- What special competencies are needed by adult researchers and evaluators, especially ones whose normal training lacks age-related content?

- What are some strategies for strengthening support for sustaining the field?

- What kinds of support will be needed from private institutions and public agencies, and what are some ideas for making this happen?

Categories

◇ Youth as co-researchers – high levels of youth participation

◇ Youth participation in evaluation of youth services

◇ Critical perspectives on engaging youth in research

Abstract

Few published reports have explored the potential for participatory action research (PAR) with injecting drug users (IDUs) that extends their role beyond consultation, facilitating recruitment or conducting peer-driven interventions We reflect on the process of conducting participatory needs assessment of young IDUs who do not access drug health services using qualitative methods. This report draws on formal feedback obtained from the research teams, which comprised both peer and health workers, and informal observations made by the university researchers, to describe the benefits and challenges inherent in implementing this approach. Results indicate that the privileged access of peer workers to hidden IDUs and sensitive information improved the quality of the data. The PAR approach was also instrumental in changing the negative attitudes of health workers towards IDU and peer involvement in service delivery, an important first step towards meaningful consumer participation. However, the success of peer involvement is dependent on the extent to which health workers are willing to accept IDUs as colleagues rather than clients. We suggest that the capacity of peer workers to undertake these roles needs to be judged according to performance-based criteria that regards their injecting drug use experience as a legitimate form of expertise.

Level of youth participation

Youth peer workers were hired to work collaboratively in research team with health care workers (who also had no research experience) and university researchers. They received training on research methods and participated in the collection of data and some aspects of data analysis. While it was intended that they hold equal power and responsibility with their health care worker colleagues, there were some power issues that came up – see below.

Values and approach

• Participatory Action Research approach, described as: counter to expert-driven research; people conduct research that is by them rather than on them; focus on research for the purposes of action

Practicalities

• Youth peer workers were ages 16-25

• Youth peer workers were recruited based on their knowledge of injection drug use issues and access to youth injection drug use networks

• Interviewees were compensated $20 for their time and were recruited using snowballing sampling techniques – using existing peer networks

Evaluation

Evaluation was conducted of the research process itself, towards the end of the project. Methods used were semi-structured interviews followed by a focus group with a researcher who had been less involved with the project.

Useful for ACT

Methods

Each research team consisted of two peer workers, two to four health care workers, and two university researchers. The researchers trained the rest of the team for five days on topics including: participatory and qualitative methods, research ethics, data collection and analysis, narrative data collection and conducting focus groups.

The three months following the training consisted of fieldwork, getting to know the injection drug use community and resources and conducting narrative interviews. After the fieldwork, the research teams conducted and facilitated a number of focus groups.

Data analysis occurred throughout the process during weekly team meetings, with new participants being recruited as new dimensions arose in the analysis. When the data was complete the researchers did an interim analysis and presented it back to the teams.

Challenges

- Especially early on in the project, skepticism on the part of health care workers that the peer workers' expertise was valid, and that they would be able to maintain confidentiality and also refrain from using drugs. This led to undue monitoring by the health care workers of the peer workers, and the health care workers adopting de facto supervisory roles over the peer workers.

- Peer workers' perceptions that health care workers were judgmental led to them being reluctant to take them to certain locations; sometimes they preferred to provide information directly to the researchers.

- Literacy issues among one peer worker and one health care worker led to initial reluctance to share notes with the researchers.

- Health care workers were sometimes defensive when interviewees criticized services

- Health care workers were concerned that there would be conflict between the confidentiality of the interviews and their mandatory reporting requirements

Enablers

- The young IDU peer workers were extremely motivated – their engagement contributed to the success of the project. This motivation was based on the excitement of learning new skills and knowledge, the confidence this created, and the sense of helping their community.

- The peer workers greatly enhanced the quality of the research, as they were able to access hard-to-reach individuals and elicit sensitive information.

- Towards the end of the project in particular, the combination of peer workers and health care workers on the research teams provided a unique mix of experiential knowledge and skills.

- Health care workers and peer workers would alternate in observing each other interview, in order to monitor their interviewing approaches. This helped with the quality of the data.

Lessons learned

- Addressing conflict directly was very important for the maintenance of harmony among teams.

- In this scenario where teams were mixed and power issues were arising, maintaining enthusiasm and motivation for the research itself, as well as fostering relationships through the accomplishment of common

tasks, helped to alleviate some of the tensions. Providing peer workers with opportunities to concretely demonstrate their abilities was also found to be more useful than trying to address these issues through training workshops. It should also be noted that in the end, the health care workers achieved a new level of respect of peer workers as a result of their work together.

- While the researchers had initially intended to be less involved with the research process itself, a significant amount of supervision and assistance was required so that teams could build research skills and acquire confidence. Over time, this situation improved.

- In spite of initial judgments by health care workers, the peer workers were exceptionally reliable in spite of it being, for some of them, their first employment experience.

- The success of this type of project is dependent upon peer workers being accepted as colleagues rather than clients, and their experiential expertise being viewed as legitimate and valuable.

de Winter, M., & Noom, M. (2003)

Someone who treats you as an ordinary human being...Homeless youth examine the quality of professional care

The British Journal of Social Work, 33(3), 325-337

Categories

◇ Youth as co-researchers – high levels of youth participation

◇ Youth participation in evaluation of youth services

Abstract

In this article we describe a peer-research project, in which 19 homeless youngsters interviewed 190 of their "colleagues" about the quality of professional care & the improvements that, according to them, should be made. The interviews were followed by discussion meetings with social workers & policymakers. The youngsters report mixed feelings about the professional care system. On the one hand, they think they should do more themselves, there should not be too much professional interference & certainly not a patronizing attitude. On the other hand, they want better advice & assistance that is rather based on a joint effort. The essence of professional care is, according to both the young & the professional participants, to find a balance between independence & assistance. From an educational point of view, social workers & adolescents operate at daggers drawn. Conflict & opposing views are often an inherent part of the road to gaining autonomy. This process, which is often painful, can only be successfully completed in an atmosphere of sincerity, mutual trust, & consultation. Dialogue at all levels is believed to be a sine qua non in the improvement of professional care for homeless youth.

Level of youth participation

This was not youth-led research – adult researchers defined the problems to be addressed and the methods to be used – but youth did the interviews and participated in the analysis of the data and dissemination of results. Most, but not all youth who interviewed participated in the subsequent steps. Only recommendations that were arrived at by consensus were included in the report. No discussion of power dynamics.

Values and approach

• Participation (described as a right that benefits both the individual participant in terms of wellbeing, and society – in this context they are referring to the participation of the interviewees)

• Peer Research approach, defined as: individuals from a particular group participate in doing research about their own group; this is perceived to enhance both the quality and the credibility of the research

Practicalities

• 19 homeless youth were recruited

- The youth co-researchers were paid £4.50 for each interview in which all multiple choice questions had been completed and responses to open questions were sufficiently detailed. They were also compensated for participating in the data analysis process.

Evaluation

None described. This paper is more focused on the dissemination of the results of the research, as opposed to discussing the research process.

Useful for ACT

Methods

Youth were recruited from youth organizations to participate in the research process. During a weekend of training, youth were trained in how to interview, and were able to give some input on the questionnaire itself (it was presented to them in draft form).

Each youth co-researcher interviewed ten peers. Most of the youth co-researchers then continued on to discuss and analyze the data and its implications.

Challenges/Enablers

None described.

Lessons learned

None described.

Categories

◇ Innovative/arts-based methods

◇ Focus on empowerment

Abstract

In this manuscript we detail the application and utility of participatory photo mapping (PPM) for studying the implications of place for the health of children. PPM is a transdisciplinary approach that integrates digital tools, narrative interviewing and participatory protocols in order to produce knowledge that can be shared and acted upon by community-based health research partnerships. In discussing the application, strengths, and weaknesses of this method, we relate our own experiences with using PPM for a recent study of neighborhood health and safety that involved young people from a variety of age groups in Madison, Wisconsin. The resultant maps were persuasive presentation tools and provided guidance for community-based interventions.

Level of youth participation

This was not youth-led research. Youth were recruited to participate in the collection and interpretation of data, but had no input into the actual research process and methods. However, during the discussion of the data, youth and researcher interpretations were given equal weight.

Values and approach

- Inclusion (of communities in place-based research; incorporation of the community's insights and desires into the research process – this is important because of the knowledge these communities hold about their own issues)

- Transdisciplinary collaboration (between community residents, service providers and researchers)

- Community-Based Participatory Research approach, defined as consisting of participation of the community in: generating data about their own lives, interpreting data, presenting results to decision makers, developing and participating in actions, and evaluating outcomes

Practicalities

- Youth involved were ages 10-18

- Youth were separated into three groups according to age: 10-11, 12-14 and 15-18

- This was executed as an afterschool project

Evaluation

This paper is more focused on the development of the participatory photo mapping method. No formal evaluation of the research process itself.

Useful for ACT

Methods

The method used to collect data was participatory photo mapping, which includes images, narratives and GPS – the latter serves to link the qualitative data contained in the photographs and narratives to specific geographic locations. The use of photography helps participants to frame their everyday experiences, while the mapping aspect allows for a connection between health and place,

Photography is used for a number of reasons, including that it is fun, easy, does not elicit the same level of self-consciousness as do drawing and writing, accessible even to very young children, and provides a useful medium for approaching abstract questions.

Step 1 involves giving participants digital cameras and GPS devices with which to take photos and record locations; step 2 involves having the photos be the basis of individual and collective narratives; in step 3 the images are mapped on a neighbourhood level; and, in step 4 a geographic information system (GIS) is produced using the quantitative and qualitative data.

The results were presented by the youth and researchers to police officers, health care providers, neighbourhood residents, community leaders and newspaper reporters. Actions that resulted have included youth-led tours of the neighbourhood for health care providers, and recommendations to City and Town agencies to inform their planning,

Challenges

- Photographs can be interpreted in a number of ways – their meaning is open to misinterpretation and contestation

- Photographs that motivated the most discussion were those that depicted illegal activity – these were quickly deleted and unable to remain part of the research

- There were many more photographs produced than could be used in the research, because there wasn't enough time to attach narratives to all of them

Enablers

- The photographs and maps allows for a shared conceptual framework between participants and researchers; each could offer their interpretation of these, which helped bridge a gap between the two groups

- The teenagers in particular were extremely motivated

Lessons learned

- Participatory photo mapping proved to be a useful method of engaging community to participate in research – more rich than textual or numerical data

Dentith, A. M., Measor, L., & O'Malley, M. P. (2009).
Stirring dangerous waters: Dilemmas for critical participatory research with young people.
Sociology, 43(1), 158-168.

Categories

◇ Critical perspectives on engaging youth in research

Abstract

This article explores dilemmas of critical, participatory research with young people, illustrating examples from research in the UK and the US and highlighting issues of access, participation, dissemination and the misuse of findings. The authors stress the need for new field strategies including more participatory approaches and attention to transgression of power through research.

Level of youth participation

The research wasn't youth-led in any of the three projects described, but the research processes were participatory and allowed for youth input in a greater than usual way. The focus here is on the exploration of innovative, participatory qualitative research methods that disturb the power dynamics in intergenerational research with youth.

Values and approach

• Participation (collective investigation and action; framework that acknowledges that research has traditionally been done on and for people, and not with them)

• Empowerment (of participants to transform social relations, through new methods and research strategies)

• Social justice (the research itself should be structured in a socially just way, and be always directed towards creating a more socially just world)

Practicalities

None described.

Evaluation

None described.

Useful for ACT

Methods

Three projects are discussed here. All three attempted to use methods that would alter the usual researcher/researched power dynamics.

Las Vegas project

This project used testimonio – a type of interview that generates lengthy, in-depth accounts in which the participant is framed as the central witness in the events she experienced. The researcher's questions are omitted in the transcript and what results is a kind of "novella" of her experience. These are then provided to the participants so that they can edit and have full control over them.

East Coast project

Before and during the project, discussions took place exploring the implications of participation and the intent of the research. This allowed for the examination of the processes of

participation themselves, and the topics that participants hoped to explore. Focus groups centred on the analysis of narrative interviews about sexual abuse; these groups did not follow and structure pre-determined by the researchers, but followed more of an organic group process.

UK project

Local advisory groups of youth were established to help direct and comment on each phase of the project. They helped create interview topics and pointed out issues of importance to youth. Peer research was another component, in which young parents were shown how to do qualitative interviewing and then in turn trained other peer researchers, and so on.

Challenges

- All three projects revolved around youth and sexuality, resulting in roadblocks being erected by school officials

  ◇ In one study, the school principal refused to allow participation even though students' parents had consented

  ◇ In that same study, recruitment through a community centre of Latina youth was thwarted by parental fear that their illegal status would be revealed and their daughters exposed to foreign values; the young women, who had agreed to participate, were not permitted to by their parents

  ◇ In another study, the schoolteachers only allowed the researchers to come in and present information on "other" teens, rather than allow the students to discuss their own experiences of sexuality

- In one study, the researcher's outsider status, combined with the sexual content of the research, resulted in further suspicion and ostracism of the researcher

Enablers

- In one study, the researcher had insider status in the community and was acquainted with school administrators; this allowed for full access to the students and the ability to create a safe space for the discussion of taboo subjects such as childhood sexual abuse

- Giving participants control over the language used – for example "young parents" rather than "teenage pregnancy" – was an empowerment tool.

Lessons learned

- While youth participation in research is strongly recommended by the powers that be, any content that is not politically neutral will encounter some resistance from those same powers.

- Truly participatory methods that disturb the usual power relations in research can generate extremely high quality data, beyond what has been produced in the past.

- Participatory research can have a positive impact on participants' worldviews; for example, all three projects offered participants different ways of understanding their sexuality than they had had prior to the research.

Driskell, D., Fox, C., & Kudva, N. (2008)
Growing up in the new New York: Youth space, citizenship, and community change in a hyperglobal city
Environment and Planning A, 40(12), 2831-2844

Categories

◇ Civic participation/social action

Abstract

We describe a participatory-action research program through which a group of young people in Jackson Heights, Queens, navigates an emergent youth geography defined by the shifting patterns and dynamics of immigration as well as by ongoing processes of adultification, neglect, and active exclusion. In this terrain, space, place and citizenship are intertwined in new and complex ways, especially for young people who are in the process of forming their identity as individuals and citizens. Through their work and actions in place, they demonstrate that, even in an environment where public space has been significantly eroded, place not only can continue to be central to the lives of young people, but also can provide the locus for an expanded citizenship.

Level of youth participation

Youth were involved from the beginning of the process in the form of youth representatives, but this was not youth-led because youth were some of many parties in the planning process. Older youth were also part of the execution of the project (high school age staff participated in leading the younger participants), while the younger youth participants appear to have been involved in the collection and analysis of data, and the planning and implementation of actions. Not much detail provided on how this participation played out.

Values and approach

- Action (through action, the object of action becomes transformed – as does the youth's understanding of the object and of themselves; using the model of making some small changes in their neighbourhood environment as a way of teaching collective action for change; interplay and interconnections between research and action)

- Democratic/civic participation (engaging youth in social action as a means of educating them to be active citizens)

- Action Research approach, defined as: engaging youth as co-researchers in building their understanding and developing responses to issues they face

Practicalities

- The project was launched in six neighbourhoods in New York City (one group focused on here)

- Twenty diverse youth participated, between ages 11-14

- Framed as university-community partnership; graduate students were placed at community organizations to work with the agency staff and some high-school age staff

- Project was in the format of a 6-8 week summer program, over two summers

Evaluation

None described.

Useful for ACT

Methods

The activities of the summer program were defined by agency staff, youth representatives, and university students and faculty. This group defined goals, processes of collaboration, and research methods. Methods were to include: one-on-one interviews, walking tours led by youth, photography, and youth mapping. An action at the end of the summer was also to be included. No further detail on methods.

Challenges

- Local officials weren't always in agreement with the project's goals

- Adults were often focused on efficiency, which prevented them from allowing youth to do things their own way and sometimes make mistakes

- The diversity of participants (also an enabler) meant that they often had different priorities and understandings

Enablers

- The diversity of participants allowed for some common ground in spite of differences – there was a common sense of exclusion among all youth, and they shared common space; eventually a common sense of identity emerged

Lessons learned

- The building of relationships over time in the context of this summer program ended up trumping any differences along racial, nationality and class lines – this was also due to the space provided for the discussion of difference and the emergence of common ground.

- The actual practice of collective action, rather than just talking about it, led to the fostering of democratic participation among these youth and the building of cohesion among them as they worked on common action projects.

- Small transformatory acts formed the basis for a sense of collective youth citizenship.

Categories

◇ Innovative/arts-based methods

◇ Youth as co-researchers – high levels of youth participation

Abstract

Describes the authors' practice experiences in a number of different settings using the social action model Fleming in England & Keenan in Northern Ireland. They have also provided training for youth social workers in Ukraine on issues of social action & empowering practice. The aims here are to (1) consider issues & debates around the concept of marginalization; & (2) with reference to Northern Ireland, England, & Ukraine, provide some perspectives on the situation of young people, with examples of the mechanics of marginalization. Examples of the social action approach & how it differs in philosophy in the three countries & in the settings of research, practice, & training are presented.

Level of youth participation

Youth controlled the topics of discussion, the discussions themselves and how long they took. Large focus on dialogue between youth and researchers in an effort to break down the conventional roles and power dynamics between youth and adults. There remains a bit of a top-down approach, in the sense that the adults are there to provide an empowerment process to the youth, but overall the youth involved appear to have had significant decision-making power.

Values and approach

- Participation (in the definition of problems and solutions, and in the enactment of those solutions)

- Assets (assertion that young people have skills, understanding and ability; rejection of negative labels ascribed to them)

- Rights (to have voice, to determine what services and research activities in their community should look like)

- Empowerment (through engaging in social action, as defined by the group; through a collective effort marginalized groups can gain power)

- Power-sharing (between service providers and service users, academic and community researchers; decision-making power should be shared)

- Social Action Research approach, defined as: a process through which participants are empowered to define their own needs and, through participation in this process, shape their environment; social problems understood to be complex and not residing in the individual; all aspects of the process to challenge oppression in all its forms

Practicalities

- Northern Ireland project worked with youth ages 10-13 over a period of ten months

Evaluation

None described.

Useful for ACT

Methods

Projects in three communities are described, some in little detail.

Social action research in England

Only method described is group discussion in which the topics were chosen by youth and the discussions controlled by youth.

Social action research in Northern Ireland

The group identified the issues that concerned them. This process included taking photographs and discussing them; the discussion was recorded and transcribed by the Social Action worker. The group was presented back the comments from their discussion and together analyzed what the key issues were, then worked on coming up with creative solutions. They eventually produced a booklet and a video, presented their work at a conference, and formed alliances with adults in order to realize their identified solutions.

Social action research in Ukraine

Not relevant for ACT – training of youth social workers in the Social Action philosophy.

Challenges/Enablers

None described. This article is mostly focused on the benefits of the Social Action approach in general.

Lessons learned

Have found that the Social Action approach has been appropriate for working with marginalized groups – being based on dialogue, negotiation and a clear set of values

Flicker, S. (2008)
Who benefits from community-based participatory research? A case study of the Positive Youth Project
Health Education & Behaviour, 35(1), 70-86

Categories

◇ Youth as co-researchers – high levels of youth participation

◇ Critical perspectives on engaging youth in research

Abstract

Community-based participatory research (CBPR) has evolved as a popular new paradigm in health research. This shift is exciting, yet there is still much to discover about how various stakeholders are affected. This article uses a critical social science perspective to explore who benefits from these changes through an analysis of a CBPR case study (The Positive Youth Project). Two major categories of beneficiaries emerged: the research itself and the partner-stakeholders. The benefits, however, were not gained without substantial human resource investment, nor were they necessarily equitably spread. Participation costs included heavy demands of time, an added burden of work, frustration with the process, missing other opportunities, risking loss of anonymity, and loss of control. Care needs to be taken to ensure that concrete benefits accrue for all project partners and costs are minimized. Another way of framing benefits is to look at the community capacities built to address future health and social issues.

Level of youth participation

A number of HIV+ youth were trained and involved in an advisory capacity to the project, while another group of HIV+ youth worked with 3 academics and 2 service providers on a working group to determine the research protocol. Data collection was done by the study coordinator (who was not an HIV+ youth). The working group did the data analysis, and results were only included that were arrived at by consensus.

Values and approach

- Critical social science approach (questioning the meanings of community participation and empowerment – looking at who benefits from Community-Based Participatory Research)

- Empowerment (described at length as a result of participation in the research process, although not explicitly articulated at the outset)

- Community-Based Participatory Research approach, defined as: being rooted in communities, utilizing the strengths and knowledge of those communities, serving community interests and embracing subjectivity rather than objectivity

Practicalities

- Youth received $20 honoraria for attending each meeting, as well as food and tokens.

Evaluation

To evaluate the research process, the study coordinator took notes during all aspects of the process and periodically conducted informal check-ins with different partners. Working group members (including academics, service providers and HIV+ youth) were also invited to do semi-structured interviews mid-way through the project and at the end of the project, although this was not mandatory.

Useful for ACT

Methods

Qualitative interviews were chosen as the means of data collection. Data dissemination included scholarly journal articles, four 'zines, community newsletter articles, conference presentations, and a national forum for HIV+ youth and service providers to discuss the findings and next steps.

Funding was sought for the working group to continue meeting beyond the research timetable and work on other projects, including a website for HIV+ youth.

Challenges

- For the academics, busy schedules meant that much of the day-to-day work with the youth was limited; they served in more of a broader guidance role. This meant that the work felt less fulfilling for these individuals.

- The fact that the academics rarely (if ever) met with youth led to some frustration from the youth, who perceived this as a sign of an inequitable partnership.

- The academics pointed out that CBPR may be a riskier proposition, career-wise, for less senior academics.

- Service providers, already overwhelmed with heavy workloads, found it difficult to manage the amount of work required by the project.

- While there was recognition that the slow pace caused by constant consultation was necessary and made for a better process, there was frustration at the lack of speed and efficiency in the work.

- It was difficult to negotiate between program funders, who found the proposals too research-focused, and research funders, who found the proposals not scientific enough.

- The youth were concerned about being tokenized, losing their anonymity and being subject to stigma and discrimination.

- Many parties were concerned about the loss of control associated with such a large project – one with multiple stakeholders and participants; roles and responsibilities were also not clearly delineated.

Enablers

- Youth participation increased the quality of the research: they helped to develop better research questions, designed recruitment materials and chose strategic posting locations, ensured more confidential data collection, and offered new perspectives and challenged assumptions during the data analysis process.

- The participation of the community (youth and service providers) made for recommendations that were relevant and useful for communities.

- The collaboration with community organizations allowed the researchers greater access to a highly politicized topic.

Lessons learned

- The youth not only contributed to better research, they also benefited from participating in the research process itself and from being treated with respect by individuals in positions of power (academics, service providers); they also benefited from feeling that they were doing something meaningful for their communities.

- The adult researchers benefited from working with the youth in this capacity – they felt inspired by the imagination and talents of the youth. They also benefited positively from being able to adopt a mentoring role.

- The service providers benefited from the concrete recommendations that they could use in their advocacy work, as well as from the building of research skills.

- Empowerment can work both ways – it can lead to positive benefits for those who become empowered, but can also set up unrealistic expectations that, if unmet, can cause cynicism and despair.

- Those who want to work with marginalized youth need to set up social relations that do not re-emphasize traditional power dynamics – for example by not having certain partners remain inaccessible to youth participants.

- When working with so many partners and advisory committees, sufficient resources must be devoted to partnership development and maintenance, while roles and responsibilities must be clearly delineated.

- In such a project with a variety of stakeholders, it must be concretely assured that there are benefits for all parties, particularly those who generally hold less power.

Flicker, S., & Guta, A. (2008)
Ethical approaches to adolescent participation in sexual health research
Journal of Adolescent Health, 42(1), 3-10

Categories

◇ Youth as co-researchers – high levels of youth participation

◇ Critical perspectives on engaging youth in research

Abstract

Purpose: In this paper we make the case for the importance of adolescent sexual health research, and argue that requiring parental consent for adolescent participation may (a) be unwarranted, (b) be inconsistent with the principles of justice and inclusiveness, (c) be confusing, and (d) serve to silence young people who most need to have a voice in sexual health research.

Methods

Through a case study of the Toronto Teen Survey, we offer concrete suggestions and alternatives for protecting adolescent health research participants in community-based settings and promoting ethical research approaches.

Results

Strategies suggested include: (1) adopting a community-based participatory research approach, (2) careful attention to youth-friendly protocols and consent procedures, (3) proper training of all research staff and peer researchers, (4) partnering with experienced community based youth-serving agencies, (5) paying maximum attention to issues of confidentiality and anonymity, and (6) valuing participation appropriately.

Conclusions

Institutional review boards and researchers should be encouraged to adopt localized context-dependent strategies that attend to the unique vulnerabilities of their particular study populations. Attention to flexibility, vulnerability, and community-specific needs is necessary to ensure appropriate ethical research practices that attend to the health and well-being of young people.

Level of youth participation

The majority of this paper focuses on the ethical issues associated with having youth complete a sexual health survey without parental consent. In terms of youth participation in the research itself, this took place through a Youth Advisory Committee, which advised on research protocol development and implementation. The committee did not produce the survey, but had a strong influence on its length, content, format and structure. The members also provided assistance in translating the jargon of the research goals and methods into language accessible to youth. The committee was eventually hired to administer the survey itself through survey sessions, upon its recommendation that youth participants would be more comfortable if peers facilitated these sessions.

Values and approach

- Inclusion (of youth as participants in sexual health research – here participation is defined as being able to complete a survey without parental consent)

- Youth voice (importance of hearing and not silencing youth voices when it comes to research about them or evaluation of services they use)

- Community-Based Participatory Research, defined as: working in an equitable partnership with those most affected by an issue to find solutions related to action; participation in a research process is seen to build skills and be empowering

Practicalities

- Members of the Youth Advisory Committee were recruited from partnering youth-serving agencies: they applied, were interviewed, and were selected in order to provide diverse representation on the committee.

- They came on as volunteers and were paid a small stipend for their participation.

- The youth who participated in completing the survey received condoms, a sexual education booklet, and a movie pass as tokens of appreciation.

Evaluation

None described.

Useful for ACT

Methods

The method of data collection was a written survey, explained and administered by members of the Youth Advisory Committee. Maximum attention was paid to issues of confidentiality and anonymity. Survey sessions were followed by sexual education sessions, during which survey respondents were able to ask questions anonymously (through a drop-box) about sexual health and have these answered in a workshop setting.

Survey respondents were acknowledged not only for their time, but also for their role as participants in the development a citywide youth sexual health strategy.

Challenges

None described.

Enablers

- Partnering with and having the research site be a trusted community service provider (in this case, Planned Parenthood of Toronto - PPT) allowed for that agency's experience, skills and knowledge be utilized and also provided an opportunity for research and referrals to health care to go hand in hand.

- Project staff were hired based on their experience working with youth, and all were required to undergo PPT staff training.

- Survey sessions were done on-site in youth-serving agencies in order to minimize risk to participants by providing a safe and comfortable space. This also allowed for staff of those agencies to be present should a youth become upset or other such issues arise.

Lessons learned

None described with regards to the participation of the Youth Advisory Committee, as this paper was mostly focused on the ethical issues involved with administering a sexual health survey to youth without parental consent.

Categories

◇ Youth in communities

◇ Civic participation/social action

Abstract

The field of planning is increasingly recognizing youth as an important stakeholder group, and there are calls to directly involve youth in planning processes. Because youth are in many respects different from adults, the practice of youth participation needs special consideration. This article summarizes the findings from empirical studies of youth participation in terms of the impacts on the young participants and their communities, the capacity of youth to participate, and five lessons for effective practice. The literature review will help planners create meaningful opportunities for youth to have a voice in community and environmental affairs.

Level of youth participation

This is a literature review of studies looking at youth participation in planning, with an objective of providing lessons drawn from this literature. In order for the studies to be included, youth had to have participated in all three of the following steps: assessing local conditions, developing plans for action, and building support for plan implementation. In all the studies selected, adults initiated the planning and shared decision-making with youth (none included youth-initiated planning.

Values and approach

• Children's rights (particularly the right to participate in decisions affecting their lives)

• Sustainable development (youth are the heirs of current environmental and social planning decisions)

• Civic participation (of youth benefits the youth themselves in that they feel more connected to their communities, their communities in that youth serve as resources, and society as a whole in that youth and adults better understand each other)

• Assets (youth are resources for community development)

Practicalities

• Studies included were direct-observation studies of youth participation in community and environmental planning

• Studies included focused on youth the majority of whom were under 18

• 18 studies were selected

Evaluation

n/a

Methods

n/a

Challenges/Enablers

 n/a

Lessons learned

The following three sections are organized according to the themes identified by the authors. The last section contains the five lessons learned from the 18 studies on how to have effective youth participation in planning.

Impacts on youth

- Youth participation in planning has positive impacts on youth participants, both in terms of knowledge and skills (learning about the local community and environment, learning how to create community change, developing planning skills) and attitudes and behaviours (becoming more confident and assertive, and developing enthusiasm for community planning and involvement).

- Youth participation in planning can also entail some negative impacts, such as frustration with lack of adult responsiveness.

Impacts on communities

- Youth participation in planning led to the following: the addressing of both youth-specific and shared community concerns, the generation of information about the community, the presentation of feasible recommendations, and in some cases, the implementation of those recommendations.

Youth capacity for participation

- Youth involvement in planning demonstrated that youth have an interest in such participation, are competent in their ability to build skills around standard research techniques, possess high levels of communicative skills, and were able to learn new sociopolitical skills (learning about other perspectives and participating in collective decision-making)

- One are where youth had a more limited capacity was in their understanding and knowledge of sociopolitical context – they were, in some studies, unsure of how to implement their recommendations and make them a reality.

Lessons learned identified in the studies

- Give youth responsibility and voice

  - ◇ Address power imbalances between adults and youth at the process level – adults should give up some power and control in order to allow a greater level of youth responsibility and voice
  - ◇ Greater autonomy and purpose leads to greater motivation
  - ◇ Youth felt satisfaction when they felt their voices were heard and that they were contributing to the wellbeing of their communities
  - ◇ Youth could sense when adults were not recognizing their abilities

- Build youth capacity (knowledge, skills and confidence)

  - ◇ Youth, due to their limited mobility, often had incomplete understandings of their neighbourhoods

- Encourage youthful styles of working

  - ◇ Youth responded well to activities that were fun, social, dynamic, interactive, expressive, constructive and challenging
  - ◇ Youth appreciated both working with their peers, and having opportunities to demonstrate their skills to adults
  - ◇ A stable workspace is important for youth, who may not have the space that adults take for granted

- Involve adults throughout the process

◇ In their adult roles, adults must take youth seriously, build youth capacity (including through training), advocate for resources on behalf of youth and support youth to advocate for themselves

◇ Adults must be honest about any limitations up front, and negotiate roles and responsibilities with youth at the beginning of the process

- Adapt the sociopolitical context

  ◇ Systems and government officials were often not responsive to youth demands, demonstrating the importance of anyone who can act as an intermediary or translator between the groups

Categories

◇ Youth as co-researchers – high levels of youth participation

◇ Youth in communities

Abstract

Water availability, use and quality in a rural watershed of the Colombian Andes were investigated through participatory research involving local youth. Research included the quantification of disaggregated water use at the household level; comparison of water use with availability; monitoring water quality of streams, community water intakes and household faucets; and the determination of land use - water quality interactions. Youth were involved in all aspects of the research from design to implementation, dissemination of results and remediation options. Quantification of domestic and on-farm water use, and water availability indicated that water availability was sufficient during the study period, but that only an 8% decrease in dry season supply would result in shortages. Elevated conductivity levels in the headwaters were related to "natural" bank erosion, while downstream high conductivity and coliform levels were associated with discharges from livestock stalls and poorly maintained septic tanks in the stream buffer zone. Through the involvement of youth as co-investigators, the knowledge generated by the research was appropriated at the local level. Community workshops led by local youth promoted water conservation and water quality protection practices based on research, and resulted in broader community participation in water management. The approach involving youth in research stimulated improved management of both land and water resources, and could be applied in small rural watersheds in developed or developing countries.

Level of youth participation

Youth were involved in all aspects of the research: design, data collection, analysis and results dissemination. Youth also received training in both research and environmental data collection techniques. No discussion of youth-adult power dynamics. Youth are referred to here as "co-researchers."

Values and approach

- Education (through participation in research – in this scenario they are referring specifically to environmental education)

- Participatory Research approach, defined as: partnership between scientists and citizens in order to better recognize the complex nature of issues and produce solutions that work for the end users; local ownership of the research

Practicalities

- 30 youth were recruited from local schools and a regional youth natural resource education project

- Youth were ages 9-17

Evaluation

None described.

Useful for ACT

Methods

A survey was developed, field tested and used with local farmers; youth participated in all three of these steps related to the questionnaire. Groups of two or three youth, accompanied by one scientific advisor, administered the survey in the field. Households were located using GPS technology and later transferred to Geographic Information Systems (GIS). The GIS work was done by youth, who were trained to do so, under the supervision of a technician.

Results were analyzed by the youth and the scientists. Youth then co-presented the findings to their communities through workshops, which included discussions of next steps.

Challenges

None described.

Enablers

- The format of a community workshop allowed both for the presentation of the data and also the contributions and expertise of community members to be shared.

Lessons learned

- The fact that youth participated in all aspects of the study allowed for dialogue on water resources issues and the actual adoption of recommendations. It also allowed for local appropriation of the research. Essentially, this participatory approach stimulated locally led action.

- The research process provided an opportunity for youth to become educated on environmental issues, and also to become educators to their peers and communities.

- Institutional support is required for this type of intensive level of training for youth in research techniques.

Categories

◇ Critical perspectives on engaging youth in research

Abstract

This study used Q methodology to examine perspectives regarding participatory action research (PAR) among participants in a UNICEF initiative aimed at enhancing HIV/AIDS prevention among youth in the Caribbean. We interviewed 20 youth PAR researchers and 12 project managers from youth organizations about their attitudes and experiences. Statements from the interviews were used in a structured ranking task. Q factor analysis of the rankings identified three clusters of respondents with differing viewpoints on PAR. The clusters respectively saw PAR as an effective peer education tool, an empowering process for youth, and a tool for gathering information on the gap between knowledge and behavior. We identified divergent perspectives on the purpose and utility of PAR among participants who received the same orientation, training, and support and who worked in the context of a single initiative. These multiple perspectives present both challenges and resources for health projects.

Level of youth participation

This is a study looking at different perspectives on PAR as a tool to prevent HIV among youth in the Caribbean – looking at different ways in which PAR is actually implemented in the field, even within the same organization and program. Youth are involved here only as interviewees.

Values and approach

n/a. In their examination of Participatory Action Research, it is understood as: research with the collaboration of those affected by the issue of interest, with a purpose of education or effecting change.

Practicalities

The PAR researchers interviewed were ages 16-22, and some project staff were also young adults.

Evaluation

n/a

Useful for ACT

Methods

30 interviews, using Q methodology, were conducted with both youth PAR researchers and "Right to Know" (UNICEF HIV prevention project) staff. No information about how Right to Know (RTK) is structured as a PAR initiative.

Challenges/Enablers

n/a

Lessons learned

This section will discuss the research findings with regards to the different perspectives on PAR.

Convergent views across interviewees

- Acknowledgement of the power of youth collective action

- Peer education plays an important role in HIV/AIDS prevention

- PAR helps researchers and research participants develop a "critical eye"

- PAR as a problem-solving tool with wider application beyond HIV/AIDS

Cluster A: Educators who emphasized youth participation – education oriented

- Concerned with lack of space for youth input in RTK decision-making

- Emphasized participation of youth in HIV/AIDS education specifically

- Saw PAR as an education tool

Cluster B: Egalitarian educators who emphasized empowerment – empowerment/action oriented

- All young people have potential as PAR researchers:

- Emphasis on importance of youth ownership of the research and action

- Empowerment of youth seen as more important than the generation of research findings

- Saw PAR as a tool for youth empowerment as well as the building of youth-adult solidarity

- Also saw PAR as an empowerment process that could diminish HIV/AIDS stigma and discrimination

Cluster C: Researchers concerned with the knowledge/behaviour gap [around HIV knowledge and risk behaviours] – research oriented

- More concerned with HIV prevention and the gap between youth receiving knowledge and actually implementing behaviour change

- Collecting information about HIV/AIDS for UNICEF was considered important – more of a discussion of different PAR tools and their usefulness in collecting data

Conclusions

- Each of the uses of PAR emphasized by the interviewees have roles to play in HIV prevention

- The variance in perspectives demonstrates the importance of acknowledging these differences, and building on them – these differences could be viewed as a strength rather than a weakness

- There must be an awareness in any project using PAR that different viewpoints could be operating

- These diverse perspectives offer a starting point for deeper examination of dynamics of participation and empowerment in communities through research

Facilitating youth participation in a context of forced migration: A Photovoice project in Northern Uganda

Categories

◇ Innovative/arts-based methods

◇ Focus on empowerment

Abstract

This paper describes a documentary photography (Photovoice) project conducted in 2007 with young people (ages 12 to 16) living in an internal displacement camp in northern Uganda during a time of great transition following more than 20 years of civil war. Twelve students were randomly selected from three schools after several weeks of instruction in English and photography. Over the course of six weeks, students used digital cameras to document life in their communities. The students and the facilitators met weekly to discuss the images and to identify and reflect on community issues. The students' work was then used to advocate for community change and to raise support for their secondary school fees. This paper reports on the adaptation of the Photovoice method (Wang and Burris 1994, 1997) in a setting of internal displacement to be a tool for engaging youths in conversations about their communities and pursuing individual and social change.

Level of youth participation

This study focused more on the Photovoice process as a means of empowerment as opposed to a means of collecting data, although objectives of the study included identifying important community issues and appealing to decision-makers as a means to create change. Youth were involved only as participants in the Photovoice process.

Values and approach

- Youth voice (personal accounts that are understood to include an account of resilience, which is often ignored by outsider voices that assume helplessness; as a means of challenging dominant narratives)

- Assets (seeking narratives that highlights strengths rather than deficits)

- Inclusion (of those who are not generally invited to participate in decision-making or knowledge production)

- Collaboration (in producing knowledge and understanding experiences)

- Empowerment (an on-going process located in the community, through which people who generally lack an equal portion of resources gain greater access to and control over those resources)

Practicalities

- Youth participants were ages 12 to 16

- Equal numbers of boys and girls participated

- Each participant received a photo album of a selection of their prints

Evaluation

None conducted.

Useful for ACT

Methods

Used Photovoice and adapted it to the low-resource context of youth in an internal displacement camp in Uganda. Three schools were selected and 125 students were given English language, creative writing and photography instruction. Given limited resources, 12 students were selected to participate in the Photovoice project by random lottery. The initial instruction was provided in order to build relationships, get an idea of the youth's English and writing abilities, and to offer some resources and training to all, as only a few would be selected.

The fieldwork component lasted six weeks, with one assignment being given out each week. Also, two group outings (in groups of four, sharing two cameras) and one group discussion took place each week. Discussion sessions used photographs as "triggers" for discussion and were audio-recorded. After each outing, participants were asked to complete an individual reflection using a set of questions.

The photos have been used to raise awareness and funds for the schools and students. The photos are considered the students' property and thus used only for education or for the purpose of raising funds that will directly benefit the students.

Challenges

- Group discussions were usually superficial and lacked depth. They served to generate information and new questions about community life, but did not address participants' emotional connection to community issues.

- The use of digital photography meant that the volume of photos was high, creating challenges for the discussion sessions.

- The youth, accustomed to researchers and aid workers focusing on deficits, required encouragement to explore a more strengths- and assets-based perspective in their photography and discussion.

Enablers

- The participants excelled at photography in both technical and creative terms, in spite of minimal instruction.

Lessons learned

- A Photovoice process is possible even in marginalized, resource-limited settings

- Digital photography was necessary due to the lack of availability and the high cost of photo processing in this setting.

- The Photovoice process allows for collaborative knowledge construction, through the taking of photos and subsequent discussion

- Youth identified that photography could be used to share information about the way they lived, and that having cameras and doing photography gave them a sense of importance in the community.

- Digital photography is an appropriate medium for youth, in terms of their age, experience and context.

- Policy-makers were not, but should have been, invited to participate in the project from the beginning – this could have created opportunities for the participants to advocate for change.

- There was a lack of praxis; rather, there was a focus on photography and discussion, then action.

Categories

◇ Innovative/arts-based methods

◇ Critical perspectives on engaging youth in research

Abstract

This article describes & critiques the pilot phase of a project in which an ethnically diverse group of students from a large southwestern urban high school created culturally based substance abuse prevention videos for urban middle school students. The rationale evolved from research that suggested that a peer-created, culturally specific approach to drug abuse prevention would be more effective than would programming created by adults operating from a "so-called culturally-neutral" perspective. The dual perspective of this article includes both the field experiment per se & the data collected, using a case study perspective. Overarching themes of culture & power are discussed, as are the elements of age & gender. Implications extending beyond the pilot offer insights for researchers & practitioners.

Level of youth participation

This article does not involve any kind of research that engages youth as co-researchers in any capacity; rather, it evaluates the process of having youth create videos, with the assistance of adults, for the purposes of propagating peer-developed culturally specific drug prevention messages. It does discuss youth-adult power dynamics that arose during the production of the video.

Values and approach

• Peer model (youth, as experts, can produce more authentic, culturally specific and locally specific messages for their peers than mainstream adults could – as such, adults should play assistance rather than leadership roles)

• Cultural grounding of work (countering the norm of assuming that educational messages around drug use prevention can be culturally neutral or universal; developing prevention messages using the personal experiences of students in order to avoid stereotyping)

Practicalities

• 10 high school students volunteered to be part of the video production team

• The youth were ages 15-18; 5 African American, 3 European American, 2 Mexican American; 6 female

• 25 other mostly Mexican American students were selected, through auditions, to play parts in the video

Evaluation

The researchers used a qualitative case study approach to evaluate the process of having youth produce culturally specific drug prevention messages through video for other youth. Video ethnography techniques were used to evaluate the production process, including participant observation, intensive interviews and focus groups.

Useful for ACT

Methods

10 youth were recruited from a media and communications magnet program at a large high school with a pre-dominantly Mexican American student population. As such, the target audience of the video was to be Mexican American. This core group was responsible for writing the script, casting, filming, music, sound and directing.

An adult professional video director was hired to assist the students, and a teacher from the school also played a role as executive producer and instructor. The adult research team facilitated student group sessions and provided information about existing research on drug prevention messaging and Mexican American culture.

Challenges

- The cultural makeup of the production team did not reflect the culture of the actors (mostly Mexican American) or of the target audience. The director of the video was also a white Anglo male. As a result, the script reflected dominant narratives and stereotypes about Latino culture.

- The Mexican American students on the production team, as well as those selected to be actors, challenged the ideas and language presented in the script as being non-authentic and "written by white people for white people," but their voices were not considered to be legitimate; rather, Hollywood's depiction of Latino culture was reified over the voices of the Mexican American students.

- In spite of verbalizing intentions that this be a youth-led and youth-owned video, the adults involved monopolized the entire production process

- There was no mechanism for resolving disagreements between the Mexican American students and the adults in power.

Enablers

None described.

Lessons learned

- Youth from the target audience needed to be more strongly represented in the creative process from the very beginning.

- There needed to be a means by which the issues that arose around differing perspectives could be addressed.

- There must be greater adult recognition of the knowledge and expertise of youth who are engaged to do such work.

- There is inherent authority that comes with hosting a project within a school setting – this can lead more readily to student agreement in the face of adult authority.

- There should be an explicit process outlined the beginning that strives to counter usual school roles, including with regards to gender, age and culture.

Jennings, L. B., Parra-Medina, D. M., Messias, D. K. H., & McLoughlin, K. (2006)
Toward a critical social theory of youth empowerment
Journal of Community Practice, 14(1), 31-55

Categories

◇ Focus on empowerment

◇ Critical perspectives on engaging youth in research

Abstract

This article contributes to the development of a critical social theory of youth empowerment which emphasizes collective efforts to create sociopolitical change. It draws upon analysis of four youth empowerment models, & upon findings from a participatory research study which identified key dimensions of critical youth empowerment: (1) a welcoming, safe environment, (2) meaningful participation & engagement, (3) equitable power-sharing between youth & adults, (4) engagement in critical reflection on interpersonal & sociopolitical processes, (5) participation in sociopolitical processes to effect change, & (6) integrated individual- & community-level empowerment. It concludes with discussion of the measurement of outcomes, & the challenges & opportunities for empowerment in youth organization.

Level of youth participation

n/a

Values and approach

- Participation (their model of Critical Youth Empowerment has as its goal the positive contribution by youth to positive community development and sociopolitical change – youth participating in the building of stronger, more equitable communities)

- Empowerment (broadly defined as a process through which individuals, families, organizations and communities gain control, within their contexts, in order to improve equity and quality of life; emphasis on the process rather than the outcome)

- Social action (their model of Critical Youth Empowerment consists of processes through which youth engage in actions to create change in organizational, institutional and societal policies, norms, and values)

Practicalities

n/a

Evaluation

n/a

Useful for ACT

Methods

- Did an extensive literature review focusing on conceptual models of youth empowerment. Drew on this analysis and the researchers' own experience with community-based participatory research with youth to define six essential aspects of Critical Youth Empowerment.

- The four models they examined in addition to their own learnings from having participated in CBPR were: Adolescent Empowerment Cycle, Youth Development and Empowerment Program Model, the Transactional Partnering Model, and the Empowerment Education Model.

Challenges/Enablers

n/a

Lessons learned

Their analysis of the four models and the researchers' CBPR experience led to six dimensions of Critical Youth Empowerment.

- A welcoming and safe environment

  ◇ Where youth feel valued, respected, encouraged and supported

  ◇ Where youth have freedom, can be creative, can take risks and build skills

  ◇ This environment is co-created by youth and adults

  ◇ Where youth can experience both success and failure

  ◇ Support from adults in promoting the positive achievements of youth within the community

- Meaningful participation and engagement

  ◇ Participation in activities that allow for a meaningful, authentic youth contribution – this can combat rolelessness

  ◇ Participation in community affairs in such a way as to build skills in speaking, writing, planning, organizing

  ◇ Activities need to be relevant to the youth's own lives

  ◇ Activities need to build on underlying strengths, competencies and motivations

  ◇ Opportunities to face and overcome challenges, to occupy leadership roles

  ◇ Truly meaningful participation can lead to more sustained engagement

- Equitable power-sharing between youth and adults

  ◇ Leadership roles available to youth often come with little decision-making power – organizations need to examine attitudes, ideas and activities related to power and the sharing of power

  ◇ Power-sharing must move beyond tokenistic gestures that look good to the public

  ◇ Youth-led processes often happen with some level of adult support – this support must come without domination, providing guidance only when needed

  ◇ Programs need to be structured in ways that promote youth leadership and decision-making

  ◇ One strategy is to gradually transfer decision-making to youth over time

  ◇ Adult power and control are often wielded covertly

  ◇ Youth power seems to come more readily in small, localized efforts as opposed to larger organizational structures – these may be a jumping off point for broader, structural efforts to transfer power to youth

  ◇ Power sharing requires changes in attitude and assumptions

- Engagement in critical reflection on interpersonal and sociopolitical processes

  ◇ Increasing youth's understanding of oppressive structures and processes

  ◇ Reflecting on challenging events in order to formulate actions

  ◇ Programs for youth tend to focus on activities at the expense of time for reflection

  ◇ This requires adults who are skilled in facilitating this type of critical examination

  ◇ Methods that appeal to young people should also be used; for example, arts-based

- Participation in sociopolitical processes to effect change

- ◇ Moving beyond civic service and participation to include social action and organizing around relevant issues
- ◇ One example that has been found to be empowering is participation in changing negative societal images of youth

- Integrated individual- and community-level empowerment

  - ◇ Provision of opportunities to both build individual skills, and also engage with diverse sectors of the community
  - ◇ Building ties to the community, developing an understanding of different perspectives, nurturing a commitment to contribute to the bettering of the community
  - ◇ Participation in community also contributes to a more equitable, diverse representation within that community

- Implications for practice

  - ◇ Education and training for adults is required so that they can become more conscious of power-sharing with youth, facilitate examinations of sociopolitical structures, and guide a supportive youth-led process
  - ◇ Greater understanding required of how youth from diverse communities might experience empowerment differently

Jupp, E. (2007)
Participation, local knowledge and empowerment: Researching public space with young people
Environment and Planning A, 39(12), 2832-2844

Categories

◇ Youth in communities

◇ Critical perspectives on engaging youth in research

Abstract

A growing number of reflective and critical voices around participatory research practices have questioned the extent to which power can be transferred to participants through such methods. In this paper I begin by reflecting on everyday difficulties using participatory methods with a group of young people who belonged to a youth forum in Stoke-on-Trent, England. These difficulties point to the way that research spaces constitute contexts which can enable the production of certain kinds of knowledge, and to the way that such contexts are influenced by other spaces where people might be asked to participate and self-represent. For my fieldwork participants, official or government-led initiatives around participation in decision making were often seen as problematic. However, I also argue that the young people drew on more embodied or experiential forms of knowledge in their activities, generated through participation in everyday collective practices and sociability. Such knowledge may not have been articulated but was nonetheless powerful. This suggests new ways of thinking about participation and empowerment, both for research projects and for other kinds of intervention.

Level of youth participation

Youth appear to have been engaged more as participants in a more traditional sense, in that the researcher initiated and planned the research and methods with an intention to have community members participate in a collaborative way during the interviews, focus groups and other exercises.

Values and approach

• Participation (can be used by governments and in other official capacities to lend legitimacy to public processes, without any genuine power-sharing)

• Reflexivity (as a means of giving a genuine critical look at participatory methods, and how they may continue to subjugate participants in ways that are not usually publicly acknowledged)

• Empowerment (acknowledgement that this term is used in different ways – in neoliberal regimes to imply an individual process that does not impact on the power of others, in radical liberatory discourses as a collective process by which power structures are transformed)

- Participatory research, understood as: yielding new forms of knowledge that would not be possible without the participation of non-academic researchers, being an empowering process for marginalized populations who participate, and useful for bringing about some form of social action

Practicalities

None described. This paper focuses more on the intricacies of how participation in research can actually not be experienced as an empowering process.

Evaluation

None described.

Useful for ACT

Methods

Used an ethnographic methodology, bearing in mind the critiques of such an approach (that it lends to power inequalities, that it can be colonial in its relations). The purpose of the research was to examine the impacts of community groups on the dynamics of public spaces in two housing estates. To engage these groups in a collaborative research process, formal interactions were used (various types of interviews and discussion groups). One community group with which the researcher worked was a youth group that represented the youth voice within the neighbourhood and also did volunteer work with the elderly and younger children.

One initial meeting with the youth group was to complete a mapping exercise of the public spaces they used. Later on in the project the youth group worked with a multimedia artist to create a CD-rom about their group. Due to initial difficulties with the group, the researcher eventually adopted a much less structured approach, spending time in the community working alongside residents as a volunteer.

Challenges

- The participants were, especially initially, silent and refused to participate. The researcher persisted and cajoled them, but managed to elicit very little information.

Enablers

None described

Lessons learned

- Silences and refusals might be interpreted less as a sign of the need for more time or different methods, and more as a kind of intervention into the research process itself. They may signify a need for a questioning of assumptions about what is being researched and how that information can be accessed.

- Methods that are assumed to be participatory and therefore empowering may actually be experienced as patronizing (i.e. the mapping exercise).

- Difficulty or refusal in creating maps may be due to the existence of multiple versions of youth's maps, and the difficulty in articulating these multiple versions in one map. Knowledge may not be static and waiting to be discovered, but rather dynamic and created through the research process.

- Any participatory research process limits what will be considered to be knowledge, and what knowledge will be expressed. Researchers will always come into communities with specific priorities for forwarding their own work.

- Youth may have knowledge that is produced through embodied practices and experiences, as opposed to abstracted knowledge that is more easily articulated. Therefore, certain participatory methods may be less able to capture these types of knowledge.

- Everyday, non-spectacular practices such as socializing informally and contributing to a shared space can be empowering.

- Even methods such as theatre projects or other artistic projects entail an expectation that knowledge will be provided and expressed in particular ways – for example, the agendas maybe quite specific such as combating racism or certain youth behaviours, rather than being agendas chosen by the youth themselves. Thus, participation can also be a mode of governance rather than empowerment.

- There must be some reflection on how embodied practices might be represented in the knowledge production process.

Kirshner, B. (2008)
Guided participation in three youth activism organizations: Facilitation, apprenticeship, and joint work
 Journal of the Learning Sciences, 17(1), 60-101

Categories

◇ Focus on empowerment

◇ Civic participation/social action

◇ Critical perspectives on engaging youth in research

Abstract

Multiracial youth activism groups, based in working class and poor neighborhoods, seek to improve social conditions by organizing grassroots campaigns. Campaigns such as these, which require sophisticated planning, organizing, and advocacy skills, are noteworthy not just for their political impact, but also because of the insights they provide about learning environments outside of school. In this study I adopted Rogoff's (2003) theory of guided participation as a lens through which to analyze adult approaches to working with youth and how these approaches relate to opportunities for youth to participate in social action. Drawing on 2 years of ethnographic fieldwork in 3 multiracial activism groups, I found that adults managed tensions between youth empowerment principles and the task demands of campaigns in 3 distinct ways: facilitation, apprenticeship, and joint work. This analysis is relevant to educators who wish to support youth participation in mature social practices and researchers interested in elective learning environments.

Level of youth participation

Youth did not participate in this research process at all, other than as subjects and participants in interviews. In the three projects/organizations described, youth had differing levels of participation, with some organizations fostering more youth-led processes, and others adopting more of an adult-led approach.

Values and approach

• Guided participation (a teaching/ learning process through which more experienced individuals, whether adults or peers, guide and structure the learning of less experienced individuals; the learning is accomplished mostly through doing, or active participation; the more experienced guide participation by creating a sense of safety and belonging, and providing access to necessary resources, information and opportunities)

• Social action (youth activism as a way to change public policy and negative perceptions of youth; youth activism as focusing on issues meaningful to youth)

• Assets (not expressed explicitly; mentions the insight and knowledge that youth have, and acknowledges that youth – particularly youth of colour – are generally portrayed and perceived as apathetic or uninvolved)

- Empowerment (as a discourse that explicitly views youth as a political identity, because of the exclusion of youth from may decision-making processes; youth empowerment as a process that purposely limits adult decision-making power and creates structures that allow for youth leadership)

Practicalities

Three multiracial youth activist groups were the subjects of this research study. In all three groups, youth were understood to be those of high school age, while adults were understood to be staff who were also older than 18 (most adults were younger than 24).

Youth Engaged in Leadership and Learning (YELL)

- Was funded and staffed by a university research centre, and its purpose was to develop youth leadership and research skills so that the youth could gather evidence and advocate for change. Research was central to its work.

- It included 17 youth grades 9 to 12 who received monthly stipends of $100 for continued participation.

- The project that took place during this study was a campaign to challenge negative stereotypes about youth of colour; this campaign included the creation of alternative media, the conducting of focus groups with youth and teachers, a community forum presenting findings, and a meeting with editors of a local newspaper to discuss ways of improving media coverage.

Youth Rising

- Was housed in a grassroots advocacy organization.

- A youth organizing group in which youth were expected to build youth power by organizing peers.

- Participants met twice a week and received a monthly stipend of $100

- They organized a campaign to improve student decision-making power in school policy; this campaign included getting students across the city to fill out "report cards" about their schools, presenting the results at a rally and press conference, and submitting a formal resolution to the local school board.

Teens Restoring the Urban Environment (TRUE)

- An organization that ran multiple programs to increase youth engagement in their communities.

- Planned a one-day conference for students about the implications of war on the local environment.

- Youth who participated in the planning did not need to go through a hiring process – anyone could participate; youth received stipends for their participation.

Evaluation

None described.

Useful for ACT

Methods

Examining the teaching practices used by adults when working with youth activist groups; examining how adults manage their expertise in such a way that allows for meaningful youth participation and engagement in social action. Used an ethnographic methodological approach and used the cases of three different multiracial youth activism groups in different low-income neighbourhoods.

Methods used for data collection were: observations of program activities, observation of special events, semi-structured interviews with adults and youth, and analysis of program artifacts such as newsletters. The researcher also participated in the processes of each group's planning, sometimes as an equal adult participant.

Challenges/Enablers

see Lessons learned below

Lessons learned

The first four sections here describe the findings of the study. The final section gives some recommendations based on lessons learned from the three youth groups.

In all three groups: tensions between adult guidance and youth ownership

- Desire to foster youth ownership conflicted with the complex tasks (most of which were new to youth) required for each project – all adults involved struggled with this tension.

- The three groups differed in terms of:
  ◇ How much emphasis they placed on youth leadership, and how much emphasis they placed on campaign success
  ◇ The role of adults (neutral facilitator; coach; senior colleague)
  ◇ Division of labour
  ◇ Boundary between youth and adult (clearly or unclearly demarcated)
  ◇ Types of youth participation

Three strategies were used for dealing with these tensions, and reflected project complexity, institutional contexts and goals, and youths' prior experience and skills:

- Facilitation (most used by YELL)
  ◇ Adults as neutral facilitators of a youth-led process

◇ Adults facilitated discussion, provided resources, introduced routines for effective work
◇ Adults saw themselves as outsiders, that youth participants had greater insight into the nature of problems affecting them
◇ Activities were youth-centred (with a focus on team-building and fostering the participation of all members)
◇ At the beginning, an adult facilitated a ground rules process without giving any input: youth came up with the rules on their own
◇ Adults facilitated discussion during which issues and solutions were identified, again without giving input
◇ Over time adults detached themselves from youth activities and were present to provide assistance on an as-needed basis – this role was determined by the youth themselves
◇ Youth routinely initiated meetings, explained the agenda and kept the meetings moving along; youth took turns facilitating
◇ Even when youth struggled to get their work done, adults remained removed in order to allow youth to learn from mistakes
◇ Their project ended up having less of a policy impact and more of a focus on youth voice
◇ All youth, no matter what their level of prior experience, were able to build skills and participate

- Apprenticeship (most used by Youth Rising)
  ◇ Adults had greater vested interest in the outcome of the campaigns; it was argued by one adult that empowerment requires successful outcomes
  ◇ Sometimes included direct participation of adults in campaign decisions and activities, including public presentations
  ◇ Adults contributed their input and political viewpoints, partly in an effort to combat internalized oppression and offer an alternative sociopolitical viewpoint to dominant discourses; this sometimes involved educational activities with the adults as experts
  ◇ Adults felt more of a sense of belonging in the group, partly due to shared aspects of identity (being racialized)
  ◇ Adults acted more as coaches, particularly when youth were preparing for prominent roles
  ◇ Activities were youth-centred (with a focus on team-building and fostering the participation of all members)
  ◇ Youth were given opportunities to practice their skills in a safe, supportive environment
  ◇ All of the youth involved had opportunities to play prominent roles in a number of activities, such as facilitating membership recruitment meetings and public presentation

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- ◇ There were less opportunities for youth-led activities, but the campaign was more effective in terms of being accessible to policy-makers by appearing more "professional" and had clearer policy objectives

  - ◇ Youth were able to learn more sophisticated skills in campaign organizing

- Joint work (most used by TRUE)

  - ◇ Adults had greater vested interest in a successful outcome of the work – the conference

  - ◇ The primary goal was to complete the project, rather than build skills or provide training opportunities to youth; there was little time for socializing or team-building

  - ◇ Included direct participation of adults in conference planning

  - ◇ Activities were not youth-centred; there was less of an effort to make the process youth-led or to restrict adult participation; there was no distinction between roles of youth or adults

  - ◇ Adults designed activities, prepared agendas and kept track of tasks to be completed

  - ◇ Adults tended to complete tasks that were more time-consuming or challenging in terms of requiring access to social networks; in this way they demonstrated a model of how to successfully plan a conference

- ◇ Youth who were well experienced in organizing events were able to participate in a collegial way with adults, while those who were new to the process were not provided with support to bring them up to speed

- ◇ Youth, particularly less experienced youth, had fewer opportunities to build and master skills

Based on these findings, four principles of youth civic engagement are recommended:

- Start with an authentic civic problem

  - ◇ That impacts youth and will bring them face to face with policymakers

- Provide access to mature civic participation practices

  - ◇ More limited version of empowerment in that youth are encouraged to adopt adult norms and practice – considered necessary by the author so that youth can learn the sophisticated skills needed to engage in effective civic participation

  - ◇ Adults can provide sociopolitical analyses that challenge the dominant discourses that youth may have espoused

- Be responsive to specific skill levels and interests of youth

  - ◇ Provide training and skills building opportunities if necessary

- ◇ Explicitly seek out youth contributions – otherwise there is a danger that adults will engage in a paternalistic rather than collaborative way with youth, speaking for them without consultation

- Plan in terms of timescales that exceed one or two semesters

  - ◇ To reflect the realities of social action campaigns

Maglajlic, R. A., & RTK PAR UNICEF BiH Team. (2004)
Right to Know, UNICEF BiH: Developing a communication strategy for the prevention of HIV/AIDS among youth people through participatory action research
Child Care in Practice, 10(2), 127-139

AND

Maglajlic, R. A., & Tiffany, J. (2006).
Participatory action research with youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
Journal of Community Practice, 14(1), 163-181.

Categories

◇ Innovative/arts-based methods

◇ Youth as co-researchers – high levels of youth participation

◇ Critical perspectives on engaging youth in research

Abstract

The article describes the process & the findings of a Participatory Action Research (PAR) conducted with young people in Bosnia & Herzegovina (BiH) in 2003, with an aim to develop a communication strategy for the prevention of HIV/AIDS in BiH. The study was initiated & funded as part of a global UNICEF initiative bearing the same name & aims. The process included the development of three youth research teams in three towns in BiH Sarajevo, Tuzla, & Banja Luka, that worked with their peers in their communities with a support from a Head Researcher with PAR experience. The young people developed a prevention strategy that includes peer education in elementary & high schools & cooperation with the media.

Abstract

Sparked by a global UNICEF initiative, Bosnia & Herzegovina launched a participatory action research process in which 75 young people in three towns explored local understandings, needs, & actions about HIV/AIDS, drug use, human rights, & other issues. This article chronicles the research process, the action recommendations generated by young people, & the current status of the project. It reflects on the commitments & efforts which are required when large, adult-directed organizations decide to promote youth participation, & on the institutional changes necessary to support sustained youth participation that benefits ordinary youth rather than a selected few.

Level of youth participation

While the project was initiated by UNICEF, youth themselves were responsible for defining research goals, choosing methods, conducting data collection and analysis, and developing recommendations. An adult researcher was present in a supportive role, but generally took on observer or facilitator roles. More details on project structure in the methods section below.

Values and approach

• Participation (of youth in a research process that meaningfully involves them in an issue that impacts them; as a way to create a HIV prevention campaign is relevant to youth, and addresses their needs and interests in a way that adult-designed campaigns and programs do not; engaging youth as active partners rather than passive recipients)

• Capacity-building (of youth to develop knowledge and practices to protect their health and wellbeing)

• The article discusses using a Participatory Action Research approach but does not define it

Practicalities

- On each Research Team, one youth served as a paid part-time coordinator, while the remaining four youth were each employed at 20% of full-time employment.

- Each LIGa member received a small payment for participation, of approximately $62 (US)

- LIGa members were ages 13 to 19

Evaluation

Some evaluation exercises were done, including focus groups, but these are not described in detail in the articles.

Useful for ACT

Methods

UNICEF initiated a PAR project in Bosnia and Herzegovina called "Right to Know" – a project that was implemented in a number of countries across the world. This project aimed to have youth researchers design a national communication strategy on HIV prevention for youth.

UNICEF partners with three youth-serving NGOs in three different cities. Each NGO nominated 5 youth to form a Research Team (resulting in one team per city). The youth underwent two training workshops on PAR skills and the PAR process. All three teams were supported by an adult Head Researcher.

Each team then initiated a Local Research Group (LIGa) of up to 20 youth who were interested in learning, having an impact on the issue of HIV, etc. The teams decided how they would recruit for the LIGa: LIGa members were recruited from schools, NGOs and personal contacts. The Research Teams met with the LIGa members every two or three weeks, with the Research Teams having pre- and post- meetings with the Head Researcher present as observer. During these smaller meetings, the Research Teams would plan the meetings, debrief, and define roles of team members of the following meeting (the five youth would take turns with different roles). While the Research Team ran these meetings, the structure of them was initially set up by the Head Researcher.

The LIGa members along with the Research Team members would decide what to research, how it should be researched, conducted the research, analyzed the data and developed proposals for a prevention strategy. The role of the Head Researcher was to support and build the skills of the Research Teams, supervise meetings, and act as liaison between the different teams and UNICEF.

Research methods used came in part from a PAR manual developed by a team at Cornell University for the Right to Know project. Methods used included group discussions, quantitative and qualitative questionnaires. In one city,

the group organized a two-day basketball tournament that also included dance and musical entertainment, and over the two days collected information on a "comment wall."

At the end of the project all 75 youth researchers met in Sarajevo to present their findings and proposed communication strategy to relevant stakeholders and decision-makers.

Challenges

- Following the presentation of recommendations, a funding proposal was made for the youth to continue with the implementation of the recommendations, specifically with the extension of the PAR process to rural youth. Due to the large bureaucratic nature of UNICEF, the months it took to get the proposal approved meant that the original groups of youth lost some of their momentum.

- The project had an emphasis on intense, short-term work. Such a short period of engagement does not provide youth with sustained opportunities to solidify their new skills; it also limited the sense of security and self-efficacy that youth might develop in such projects.

Enablers

- The teamwork model, in which members felt an openness and ability to express themselves freely

- Fostering of an accepting environment in which members of all ages felt that their contributions were valued

- Relaxed environment, allowing for creativity

Lessons learned

- The high level of participation of youth in this process meant that the youth felt themselves to be meaningfully involved in a national HIV prevention strategy; they felt that this moved beyond the tokenistic gestures that they had encountered prior.

- Subsequent to the project, a number of the recommendations presented opportunities for further adult-youth collaboration, but UNICEF moved forward with either adult-run interventions or brand-new efforts with different youth agencies. This points to the need to examine how effectively a large institution such as UNICEF is capable of facilitating grassroots community efforts.

- Particularly when large institutions are doing work with community groups, there needs to be flexibility built into the normally inflexible bureaucratic operations of the institution.

- Large organizations funding grassroots research efforts are perfectly placed to drive results dissemination to communities and groups across the region and allow opportunities for information sharing.

- Youth must have decision-making power not only in community-level efforts, but also in the institutions funding them.

- Such projects often cater to a carefully selected group of elite youth, which does not truly serve to transform power relations between youth and adults. Deeper transformation is required (the authors suggest greater transparency in processes and more authentic participation).

Noom, M. J., de Winter, M., & Korf, D. (2008)
The care-system for homeless youth in the Netherlands: Perceptions of youngsters through a peer research approach
Adolescence, 43(170), 303-t316

Categories

◇ Youth participation in evaluation of youth services

Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the perceptions of homeless youth of the care they receive. Since we wanted to involve homeless youth as participants in this project, we adopted the approach of peer-research. This form of collaborative research has a major role for homeless youth in making an inventory of the problems. A parallel is drawn between the parent-adolescent relationship and the relationship between social worker and homeless adolescent.

Level of youth participation

Youth did not initiate this research and their participation in the research process was somewhat limited. They did have input into the development of the questionnaire to be used during interviews, and conducted the interviews themselves. They had no role in the data analysis or dissemination.

Values and approach

- Peer research approach, described as: a collaborative approach in which the subject is also a participant; no discussion of why this approach was chosen

Practicalities

- Homeless youth defined as between the ages of 12 and 25 and having no regular place to stay

- 22 youth recruited to be peer researchers, ages 15-24

- The peer researchers received $5 for each interview completed

Evaluation

None described.

Useful for ACT

Methods

The 22 youth recruited to do peer research were recruited from organizations centering on professional care, in three Dutch cities. They were informed of the purpose of the project; they then participated in the development of a semi-structured interview. The peer researchers were trained over a weekend in how to do the interviews, and were each asked to complete 10 interviews in their home city.

Challenges/Enablers

None described

Lessons learned

None described. This article was much more focused on the significance of the results collected than on the actual process of working with youth as peer researchers.

Nygreen, K., Ah Kwon, S., & Sanchez, P. (2006)

Urban youth building community: Social change and participatory research in schools, homes, and community-based organizations
Journal of Community Practice, 14(1), 107-123

Categories

◇ Youth as co-researchers – high levels of youth participation

◇ Civic participation/social action

◇ Critical perspectives on engaging youth in research

Abstract

"Urban" youth a euphemism for underserved, poor, marginalized, ethnic minority youth can be active participants in community change. Countering the predominant image of these youth as disengaged or troubled, this article describes three projects that engage urban youth in community change through participatory research. The authors share their experiences as adult allies on these projects & examine four lessons learned, addressing: (1) the importance of positionality; (2) the role of adult allies in youth-led projects; (3) the creation of safe spaces; & (4) the building of trust & relationships. They conclude that urban youth can become a vital resource for community transformation.

Level of youth participation

Youth-led, with youth retaining control and adults providing guidance and support.

Values and approach

• Participation (youth as competent citizens and active agents of change)

• Assets (viewing youth as a resource – minority youth in particular)

• Democratic principles (being very aware of potential for adults to hijack a "youth-led" process, and making efforts to minimize adult authority)

• Social justice (2 out of 3 projects explicitly addressed social justice issues)

• Anti-oppression (recognizing the privilege associated with being academic researchers; addressing issues of power and privilege within each group)

• Participatory Action Research approach, described as: an alternative paradigm for knowledge production, in which the community affected by an issue undertake research about it, retaining control of the process while academics play a collaborative/supportive role only

Practicalities

Participatory Action Research Team for Youth (PARTY)

Five recent graduates and students from a high school (ages 16-19)

Transnational Latinas (TNL)

Three youth (ages 13-16)

Asian and Pacific Islander Youth Promoting Advocacy and Leadership (AYPAL)

Six Asian and Pacific Islander youth (ages 14-18)

Evaluation

None

Methods

There were three PAR projects done, each described separately. All three projects stemmed from an already-existing relationship between the researchers and the youth groups.

Participatory Action Research Team for Youth (PARTY)

A group of high school students and high school graduates met weekly for one year with the researcher. During this time they engaged in group reflection and dialogue about social issues, issues within the school, etc. They also conducted a survey among students and conducted interviews with school staff, teachers and students. The following year, the group developed a high school course on social justice issues, got approval from the principal to run it, and taught the course to students.

Transnational Latinas (TNL)

First year was spent building relationships and sharing personal experiences of having two homes, in the US and in Mexico, and how their experiences were invisible. They then conducted research using dialogue, interviews with transnational families, and documents collected and exchanged in these families. They used this data to create a children's book for dissemination.

Asian and Pacific Islander Youth Promoting Advocacy and Leadership (AYPAL)

The focus in this group is less on research – it was an already-existing group of youth focusing on civic participation and community leadership. The researcher became involved as a youth community organizer and the group would annually embark on a campaign to raise awareness and make change around an issue of importance to the youth, based on their personal experience.

Challenges

In PARTY, the youth were doing a youth-led project within an adult-run institution (a school); therefore, they would sometimes run into "rules" created by adults over which they had no control, in spite of having "leadership" in the project.

Enablers

None described.

Lessons learned
Recognizing Race, Class, Gender, and Culture

There needs to be an incorporation of discussion about these constructs and what roles they play in the research and roles of both adults and youth. For example, being aware of the impact on power relations of having a white adult researcher working with youth of colour.

Strengthening Adults as Allies

Be extremely aware of the challenge of guiding without leading, and without asserting adult authority. There are often adult-determined non-negotiables present from the outset, even if they are not explicit, so they found that the best approach was to put these on the table up front for discussion, and encourage the youth to come up with some non-negotiables as well.

Strong relationships based in trust and mutual respect can help to foster shared power between youth and adults. They encourage adult researchers to engage in honest reflection about the realities of power and inequality in adult-youth partnerships.

Creating Safe Spaces

Because of the lack of safe spaces for youth, it is very important to pay attention to the creation of such space for the youth involved. PARTY moved from a school-based meeting space to a member's home, and this had a significant impact on the comfort of members and consequent depth of discussion. This is also relevant for scheduling – TNL found that moving meetings time to weekends was much more convenient for youth and therefore more fruitful.

Building Trusting Relationships

Relationship-building should be central rather than peripheral, and should be a focus throughout the project rather than relegated to initial ice-breaking activities. The researchers found that the socializing and relationship-building that often happened outside of "work" time was essential to the success of the project. They also emphasize the importance of building such relationships on the youth's terms, in the manner that is most comfortable for youth.

Categories

◇ Youth in communities

Abstract

This article discusses the dissemination of a process of youth-led participatory research in urban secondary schools within the Interactive Systems Framework for Dissemination and Implementation (ISF) developed in collaboration with the CDC and its university partners (Wandersman et al. American Journal of Community Psychology, 41(3-4) 2008). The focus here is on the development of the Prevention Support System with respect to general and innovation-specific capacity building. The specific process under study involves youth-led needs assessment and research to inform the planning of prevention programs and policies to address students' health and developmental needs. The article first briefly describes the youth-led research process, its potential benefits, and a case example in two urban secondary schools. It then describes challenges and responses in providing support for the diffusion of this model in 6 secondary schools. The settings are urban public schools with a majority of students of color from diverse ethnic groups: Asian-American, Latino, and African-American. This project constitutes a collaborative partnership with a university school of public health and community-based organizations (CBOs) to build capacity for long-term, sustainable implementation of this innovative process within the local school system. The perspectives of the university-based researcher and the CBO partners on the development and effectiveness of the Prevention Support System are presented.

Level of youth participation

The model used is described as youth-led because youth had input into each aspect of the research process; however, this youth-led research takes place firmly within a structure designed by adults and is restrictive as such. The research even takes place within a school setting, as an elective course. Adults guide the research process in a teacher role, which is, in and of itself, less lendable to a collaborative adult-youth partnership.

Values and approach

• Positive youth development (provision of meaningful and developmentally appropriate opportunities; service and leadership as examples of such opportunities; drawing on existing youth resources)

• Youth-led Participatory Research approach, used to promote youth voice and engagement and defined as: research in which youth are trained to identify major issues in their schools and communities, conduct research, and take leadership roles in influencing policies that affect those issues; research that promotes a sense of ownership among youth

Practicalities

see Methods section

Evaluation

Observations of the youth-led research process are based on field notes by the primary researcher, as well as interviews. This article is, in fact, an evaluation of this particular model of youth-led research based in schools. However, it focuses more on evaluating the model from an administrative and organization-university partnership point of view than it does from a perspective of how to work do research with youth.

Useful for ACT

Methods

This article evaluates the Prevention Support Systems model of youth-led needs assessment and research with regards to student health and development. The project described was a partnership between a university and community-based organizations.

The research process took place through a research curriculum in the form of an in-school elective course – as such, the students would meet in groups of around 20 for 45 minutes, 3-5 times per week. The curriculum started with communication and teambuilding exercises, and moved on to identifying a problem of concern, developing assessment methods for data collection, collecting and interpreting the data, and initiating action steps informed by the research findings. There was an emphasis throughout on students being key decision-makers and on teachers/researchers providing guidance only.

Committees were created to serve an advisory role to the class; these consisted of two students, the research teacher, the principal and another staff member.

Two schools were examined as case studies in this article. Actual research methods appear to have been mostly surveys, although observations and interviews are also mentioned.

Challenges

- In one school, the class was able to successfully do the research, but the school administration was unwilling to act on the class's recommendations; the school administration appeared to believe that the youth-led research should focus more on issues of importance to the administration, such as improving attendance and punctuality

- Macro-level factors, such as policies mandated by the district or shortage of financial resources, came into conflict with both research classes' recommendations for policy change

- There is the issue of how to maintain motivation for a project that is carried from one year to the next and involves different students – should these students work on an issue that was selected by a previous group?

- Research teachers in schools threatened with closure due to low academic achievement faced pressures to justify their curriculum

Enablers

- In the second school examined, there was great agreement between the research class and the school administration – this was partly due to the more politically neutral topic of research

- The support provided by the university, particularly technical research support, allowed the community-based organizations involved to build their capacity to do research; this assistance also allowed the research teachers to be more aware of their options in terms of possible research methods.

Lessons learned

- A key area for further capacity development in this model was building communication with school administrators and negotiating the school and district political climate.

- Because each class defines its own research topics and forms its own recommendations, there is a need for a high degree of flexibility and responsiveness in this model, both towards the students as well as the school environment.

- The action aspect of the research requires a level of political advocacy capacity – both in terms of politics within the school and politics within the broader community or structures. This allows students to focus on issues with more potential for realizable change. Political knowledge also allows for relationships between the organizations, schools, university and district officials to be preserved.

- There needs to be a balance between youth ownership and the building of youth/adult alliances – youth ownership of a process that leads to antagonism with adults in power will not necessarily be constructive.

- Even a one-school year timeline is limited for the amount of work that is to be achieved by the research class.

Percy-Smith, B. (2007)
'You think you know? … You have no idea': Youth participation in health policy development
Health Education and Research, 22(6), 879-894

Categories

◊ Innovative/arts-based methods

◊ Youth as co-researchers – high levels of youth participation

◊ Youth participation in evaluation of youth services

Abstract

This paper draws on research in the United Kingdom which set out to explore young people's understandings and experiences of health as experienced in their everyday lives and according to their own terms of reference, rather than in response to policy priorities. The project involved a peer research process followed by a large community learning event in which practitioners, community leaders and decision makers were brought together in dialogue with young people to develop understanding and explore responses to young people's health needs as a collaborative process. The paper documents an 'alternative' 'participative action research' approach to involving young people in research and developing responses to issues and problems that affect them. The paper highlights the value of a dialogical and enquiry-based approach supported by the use of visuals for engaging professionals in collaboration with young people in a process of learning for change. It draws attention to the 'policy gap' between professional understandings of young people's health needs and young people's lived realities and how this is reflected in differences in what young people and professionals consider appropriate responses to stress.

Level of youth participation

This research process was not initiated by youth. Once recruited, the youth researchers did have a lot of freedom to choose research methods and did the data collection and analysis themselves, with adult support. A lot of emphasis in the article is placed on the dialogue and reflection event that was organized for the dissemination of findings.

Values and approach

• Participation (in decision-making about services used by youth, in order to improve those services and also extend citizenship rights; partnership as going beyond consultation and towards partnership and sharing of decision-making power;

• "Alternative" collaborative action research approach (places an emphasis on dialogue, reflection, social learning and action inquiry, and culminates in the bringing together of youth, professionals and decision-makers in a dialogic process)

• Youth voice (focuses on allowing youth to express and articulate their health needs in their own words and ways, and not forcing them to conform to policy-oriented language; new ways of seeing things and multiple perspectives are valued)

- Social action (processes through which individuals and groups increase their ability to take control of their own lives; emphasized here to reinforce the fact that this research was not simply an intellectual exercise)

Practicalities

- 11 youth peer researchers recruited, ages 14 to 19

- The researchers volunteered

- The dissemination event took place during school hours, and youth who attended were required to have parental consent; the local school authority gave written permission to school and colleges to allow students to be absent in order to attend

Evaluation

Evaluation was done of the event, but details not described of what method used. Quotes from event participants, as well as the youth peer researchers, are included. This article focuses in large part on the actual findings and also on the final data dissemination event which included youth-adult dialogue; there is less focus on the process of working with youth peer researchers.

Useful for ACT

Methods

The youth peer researchers were recruited from an already-existing youth peer leader program. The youth researchers were then trained in research methods and encouraged to think about health in different ways.

The task that was pre-determined for the youth researchers was that they would explore, with their peers, the unmet health needs of those peers. The youth researchers decided themselves what methods to use, and which peer groups they would target. The research took place in schools, colleges, Community Health Council offices, and on neighbourhood streets. The youth did the data collection and analysis themselves, with adult support. For results dissemination one youth chose a video format, while the rest used posters. These were presented at a large event including 62 youth (ages 13-21) and 36 professionals from various youth services organizations.

The dissemination event was intended to promote dialogue between youth and professionals, and allow all parties to make sense of the findings together. Participants were organized into small discussion groups, and circulated throughout the day to allow for mixing between them. Visual aides such as posters and photo-montages were used to stimulate and guide discussion. Youth and professionals were then separated

and asked to each come up with their reflections, using visual media, on future directions for health services policy for youth. Finally, all participants were brought back together to share what they had come up with.

Following the event, the research team (unclear if this means adult or youth researchers) thematically collated the data generated at the event using a grounded theory approach.

Challenges

- Some of the peer researchers felt rushed in the research process

- The amount of support and training required for the youth to do research was underestimated by the adult researchers

- There was no structure offered for subsequent implementation of action as a result of the findings – this was left to attendees (particularly adult professional attendees) to take up on their own

Enablers

None described

Lessons learned

- Having youth express themselves using visual means allowed for a more experiential exploration of youth health issues.

- Asking youth to articulate their primary health concerns on their own terms led to health and social service professionals hearing things that they might not otherwise hear, ideas that didn't fit into existing discourses of health policy – for example, seeing health in terms of social realities rather than focusing on medical perspectives

- Having the adult professionals physically present for results dissemination led to an increased motivation on their part to take action on the findings, in contrast to the inertia that often follows the release of written reports.

- This participatory, collaborative approach to research and dialogue allowed for a sharing and clarification of youth and adult assumptions about youth health needs.

Categories

◇ Youth as co-researchers – high levels of youth participation

◇ Critical perspectives on engaging youth in research

Abstract

This article explores the ways in which young people were included as research participants in a major study on teenage pregnancy & young parenthood. The study was funded by UK government through the Teenage Pregnancy Unit (TPU) & the Department of Health (DoH) Policy Research Programme & was part of a national programme of nine projects. This project, 'Living on the edge (LOTE): Sexual behaviour & young parenthood in seaside & rural areas' (Bell et al., 2004), took place between 2002 & 2004. It involved three seaside towns & their rural hinterlands in the NorthWest, North-East & South of England. The study was qualitative & most of the interviewees were young people in years 8, 10 &, where available, year 12 in selected secondary schools in both urban & rural areas. Additional interviews were undertaken with young people outside mainstream education, with young parents & with a small number of professionals. This article has been co-written by a researcher on the project & two peer researchers, who are also young mothers, from one of the study sites. Legislative & ethical support for participatory research with young people is outlined, followed by an examination of a number of methodological approaches that are available in this area. The article concludes by discussing whether or not it is possible to involve young people in research in ways that are more than tokenistic. It also considers whether or not the research process, the researchers & research participants benefit from such involvement.

Level of youth participation

The young people's advisory groups allowed for youth to have a voice in most stages of the research process, except for initiation. Some advisory group members also chose to participate in interviewing peers and in research dissemination (two youth co-authored this journal article with the main researcher). However, for the most part youth played more of an advisory and consultative role.

Values and approach

• Participation (studies involving youth should be with them and for them, not on them)

• Children's rights (to have their wishes taken into account in policy; to have accessible information about the implications of participating in the research; to have the decision-making process about research participation be ongoing rather than set in stone; to freedom of expression; to protection of privacy)

- Participatory Research approach, described as: interactive; giving greater control to research participants; including relationship-building between researchers and participants

Practicalities

- Members of the young people's advisory groups were reimbursed for expenses and for their time (no amount specified)

- Youth from years 8, 10 and 12 (in the UK) were targeted for participation in interviews

- The research took place in three regions of England

Evaluation

No specific evaluation method described. This article is a reflection by the adult researcher and two youth advisory group members on the process and outcomes.

Useful for ACT

Methods

Each of the three sites had a young people's advisory group, whose role was more consultative; it did not have decision-making power. Each group met monthly, or sometimes more regularly. The groups were intended to: sensitize the researcher to local youth cultures, inform the researcher on local conditions, assist in interview tool development, and

validate results. Also, the opportunity for members to conduct peer interviews was made available; if members were interested, training and support were provided in order for peer interviewing to occur. There was also an option for them to participate in results dissemination.

For those members who chose to do interviewing, training was provided that included role plays and confidence-building exercises.

Small, gender-specific group interviews were one method used for data collection. Youth in urban and rural high schools in the three regions were invited to participate. Due to the potential risks associated with participation (possibly necessity of breaking confidentiality for the purposes of child protection; requirement of parental consent for youth under 16), an emphasis was placed on transparency and the conditional nature of confidentiality.

Another data collection method was individual and group interviews with young parents, "detached/transient" young people, and professionals, recruited through snowball sampling. For data dissemination, members of the advisory groups were able to co-present with the researcher to the National Advisory Group, at conferences and at research seminars.

Challenges/Enablers
Challenges

- Efforts to include youth from underrepresented and marginalized communities were difficult to realize: youth from racialized communities were suspicious of being singled out for participation, particularly in light of the insecure immigration status of some, while students with communication or learning disabilities were only able to participate as interviewees and not in any other capacity.

- In organizing the advisory groups in each site there were a number of Challenges

  ◊ A single group could not include youth from both urban and rural areas due to logistical issues, nor were multiple groups feasible due to resource constraints.

  ◊ Basing a group in a school setting would be limiting in that only youth from that school could participate, but basing it outside of school would require parental consent for youth under 16.

  ◊ As a result of the above challenges, the youth who did participate were urban, white, 16 to 20 years old, and no longer in school. This was a limitation in terms of youth representation.

- During the interviews, the peer interviewers found the 50-minute time limit extremely restrictive, as they found that the interviewees were just starting to open up about sensitive topics when the interviews ended.

- It was challenging for the peer interviewers to refrain from sharing their own personal stories during the interview process, as the topics discussed caused emotional reactions for both them and the interviewees.

- The fact that some advisory group members had personal experience with teenage pregnancy meant that those who decided to participate in results dissemination became very concerned about how the media would present the findings and their involvement; some were negatively impacted by negative media representation.

Enablers

- The personal commitment of two youth advisory group members in particular led to a sustained response to negative press on the research

Lessons learned

- Early on in the life of the advisory groups, the youth comfortably challenged the researcher; however, once an emphasis was placed on meeting conduct, they became more focused on following the rules than on providing feedback. This also had a negative impact on members' motivation to participate.

- The advisory groups proved to be invaluable to the researcher. The members provided local knowledge, gave feedback on interview tools making them more gender-specific and accessible, and added questions to them as well.

- Involving young people in research in a meaningful way is possible and also enhances the quality of the research, as well as its impact.

- Non-tokenistic participation requires a greater investment in terms of time and resources.

- It was difficult to involve a wide range of diverse youth in this study; youth who were more difficult to reach or had other challenges such as uncertain status, communications disabilities and other vulnerabilities did not end up participating meaningfully in the study.

- Research with youth requires flexibility to develop effective methods while the research is in progress, rather than defining the research process before engaging with youth

Categories

◇ Youth as co-researchers – high levels of youth participation

Abstract

Although participatory research has been applied by a wide range of disciplines, the engagement of youth as partners in research and evaluation efforts is relatively new. The positive youth development movement has influenced scholars and practitioners to include youth as partners in the design and implementation of research involving issues that affect their lives. Engaging youth in research and evaluation not only generates useful knowledge for communities and individuals but also provides opportunities for the development and empowerment of youth participants, leading to benefits for young people, organizations, the broader community, and the research process. However, there has been little systematic study to establish an evidence base for these effects. This article describes four projects that illustrate active youth participation in research. These examples demonstrate opportunities for positive youth development, create a context for intergenerational partnerships, and generate research findings to inform future interventions and organizational improvements, including community mobilization.

Level of youth participation

Youth having strong participatory roles – they were recruited by adults, but once recruited they had input on the research process and collected the data. Emphasis on the benefits youth can have on the research itself, rather than solely looking at the benefits youth will accrue from participating in research.

Values and approach

• Assets (enhancement or development of particular assets through the research process, i.e. leadership skills, critical thinking skills, etc.)

• Empowerment (engaging youth in research as a means to empower them to create social change)

• Participatory Action Research approach, described as: oppressed groups collectively studying an issue that affects them, using multiple methodologies, to create knowledge in order to make change; emphasis on the valuing of lived experience of non-academics

Practicalities

Independent living study (youth/adult research partnership model)

- Six formerly homeless youth recruited from a program for homeless/runaway youth to form the core research team (assisted by two university students), and ten more youth recruited to be interviewers

Rural HIV prevention study (participant-driven recruitment)

- Nine youth were recruited through organizations to form a pilot group – these youth had input on the research plan and method. They then recruited other youth to complete a survey and participate in an educational session. Youth who participated received $15, and $10 for each new youth recruited to participate.

- Two of the youth later took on paid research positions.

"What every adolescent has a right to know" (participatory action research)

- Five paid youth researchers, working in three towns in Bosnia & Herzegovina

- In each town there was also a local research group of 15-20 youth (ages 13-19)

Evaluation

None described.

Useful for ACT

Methods

Four projects were examined:

Independent living study (youth/adult research partnership model)

The six youth researchers designed the tools and methodology, recruited subjects, collected data, interpreted the findings, and made presentations to community stakeholders. The ten interviewers were trained to identify the sample and inclusion criteria, obtain informed consent, and collect data. The interviewers conducted 165 structured 1-hour interviews in areas where homeless youth spent time.

Rural HIV prevention study (participant-driven recruitment)

The researchers created the research questions and overall structure of the project. Nine youth were then recruited to have input on the research plan and survey, and to develop an educational session. The discussions they had during this time were recorded and coded into themes. These youth then began the participant recruitment process (see Practicalities above for payment information). The two youth who were hired for research positions planned

and facilitated educational sessions and surveys, assisted with data analysis, and co-authored a journal article. They completed a university tutorial on working with human subjects.

"What every adolescent has a right to know" (participatory action research)

The five youth researchers planned and facilitated meetings, kept records, wrote reports, and were responsible for keeping the project on task. The local research groups in each of three towns developed strategies for recruiting youth members from particular vulnerable groups. The head researcher was present at most meetings, mainly to observe.

Program evaluation and organizational change (Youth and Adult Leadership for Program Excellence)

This project was essentially the development of a toolkit for how youth and adults can engage in program evaluation together. See note at end of this summary for details.

Challenges

None described.

Enablers

- Rural HIV prevention study:

- ◇ For the youth interns, learning and working in a team research environment contributed to their development of research skills.

- ◇ Youth were able to participate at various levels of intensity – paid internships, consultation as members of a pilot group, peer recruitment and survey completion.

- Overall:

  - ◇ Youth felt that the adults listened to them and valued their contributions.

Lessons learned

- In all projects, the inclusion of youth in the data analysis aspect of the research was valuable and contributed to the quality of the research. Also, the contributions of youth added weight and credibility to the findings, strengthening the possibility of fruitful social action based on the research findings.

- In some projects, the time available to train the youth on research methods was extremely limited; as a result, some of the findings were not useable. They encourage researchers to, at the very least, incorporate continuing research skills training throughout the project.

- The youth and the academic researchers sometimes had conflicting objectives and views. They encourage academic researchers to maintain an openness to youth preferences and to adapt to the methods and findings produced by youth.

- Youth researchers require significant levels of support in terms of resources, support from institutions, training (particularly with regards to working with human subjects), choice related to level of participation, realistic potential to influence policies and programs, and respect.

Note: "The Youth and Adult Leaders for Program Excellence (YALPE) resource kit was developed to assist programs in program evaluation and organizational change (available at http://www.actforyouth.net/?yalpe), and is designed for use by teams of youth and adults working in partnership, sharing power, decision making, and responsibility throughout all phases of the process.

The resource kit guides youth/adult teams through five phases of assessment and program improvement: (1) planning and preparing to conduct a program assessment; (2) collecting and compiling data; (3) analyzing and understanding the data; (4) sharing results with the group; and (5) action planning and finalizing the report. For organizations and programs that are interested in engaging youth as research partners, the YALPE provides a user-friendly, structured approach to create meaningful and developmentally rich opportunities for young people who do not demand intensive training or instruction." (p. S84)

Sarri, R., & Sarri, C. (1992)
Participatory action research in two communities in Bolivia and the United States
International Social Work, 35(2), 267-280

Categories

◇ Youth in communities

◇ Civic participation/social action

Abstract

Two case studies are investigated to examine the process & products of a participatory action research approach: a project in a large industrial center in Detroit, Michigan designed to identify community needs & develop activities for addressing those needs, & a project in a rural village in Bolivia, designed to evaluate service-based programs for adolescent youth & their families. Both projects sought to overcome resistance to new ideas & practices by eliciting the participation of community members affected by the problems, combining research & intervention strategies, building local skills & leadership to sustain the changes, & facilitating the development of cooperative working relationships between service agencies, researchers, & community residents. Results suggest that action research strategies can successfully generate new knowledge by involving community residents in identifying community needs, developing activities to address needs, & implementing activities, & by fostering collaboration between the researchers & community residents.

Level of youth participation

Unclear. Youth appear to have had some significant participation in the Detroit PAR case study, but only in the context of participation of the broader community.

Values and approach

- Participation (participation in knowledge production demystifies the process and increases a sense of community ownership)

- Anti-oppression (not mentioned explicitly, but does describe this PAR process as seeking to redress inequity and redistribute power)

- Empowerment (providing opportunities for knowledge and skills to be built within marginalized communities around how to participate in producing knowledge)

- Participatory Action Research approach, described as: seeking to reduce the gap between the researcher and the researched, by bringing them together in collaboration to produce knowledge for community betterment; integrates investigation, education and collective action; PAR methods understood to encounter less community resistance and lead to more sustained social change within the community than more traditional research methods

Practicalities

None described.

Evaluation

None described.

Useful for ACT

Methods

This study examines two case studies: one in Bolivia and another in Detroit. Since the Bolivian PAR was done with adults and not youth, only the Detroit PAR will be described here.

The PAR project was initiated by a community coalition in which the researchers had become involved. The coalition sought to evaluate a program for adolescents in trouble with the law. The coalition, along with the agency administering the program, decided on the research goals.

The first task chosen was a needs assessment of the community. Youth and parents took part in this process and were trained for their roles (not much detail on what those roles were – did include administering surveys). Very little detail on the research process itself.

Based on this assessment, funding was sought for a community centre that would be run with input from adolescents and adults in the community. This community centre focuses on engaging youth and has a community advisory committee that included some youth members. Youth are continually being trained to do further assessments and to work with younger children.

Challenges/Enablers

None described.

Lessons learned

- Local involvement in all phases of the needs assessment and intervention processes increased a community sense of ownership and resulted in sustained interest in the project, even beyond the lifespan of the specific research process

- This collaborative process with an oppressed community forced the researcher to abandon the neutral scientific observer's role and engage in issues of power inequities

- PAR allowed community members to acquire skills in knowledge development, and the research process was thus demystified

- Community participants became more conscious of how social structures operate and how they can be changed

- Time required for such a process is significant and it cannot be rushed if it is to be effective and empowering for participants

- Resources are required to facilitate active community participation – this should be foreseen at the beginning of any PAR project

**Youth action for health through
youth-led research**

Categories

◇ Youth as co-researchers – high levels of
  youth participation

◇ Youth participation in evaluation of
  youth services

◇ Civic participation/social action

Abstract

Youth participation in social action
can contribute to healthier, more just
communities & more effective youth
serving institutions. Reflecting on youth-
led research projects conducted in seven
school-based health centers, this article
presents specific youth engagement
strategies, the benefits of youth
participation in health research, & the
lessons learned for improving adolescent
health & other outcomes.

Level of youth participation

Youth were engaged in youth-led research
projects, albeit within the context of an
adult-defined youth research curriculum.
Youth decision-making power appears
to have been built into this model,
with adults serving as facilitators and
allies only. Youth took leadership and
participated in all aspects of the research.

Values and approach

- Participation (Youth participation in
  research understood to be a process
  through which youth identify issues of
  importance to them and participate in
  decision-making about how to create
  change around those issues in their
  communities)

- Social justice (greater possibility
  of reducing or eliminating social
  inequities among youth if youth
  themselves are involved in research and
  decision-making

- Social action (more of an emphasis
  on action and social change than on
  research – research as more of a means
  to an end; youth engagement in social
  action as a means of strengthening
  capacities of youth, their communities
  and youth services; in order to do social
  action, youth must have a sense of
  power and ability to effect change in
  their environment)

- Assets (youth as valuable community
  resources; communities possess greater
  knowledge about themselves than do
  experts; youth as using their knowledge
  and resources to achieve social change
  for social justice)

- Community-Based Participatory
  Research approach, described as:
  providing an opportunity for youth
  to have a voice in shaping services
  and program, but not, in and of itself,
  providing an opportunity for social
  change to occur – must be accompanied
  by other activities such as youth
  organizing or youth policy development

Practicalities

- Youth received a cash incentive for
  project participation; no further details
  given.

Evaluation

An evaluation was done to see if this model of training youth to do research, evaluation and planning was effective in preparing youth for social action. Information was gathered through sessions with the youth agency, university staff, and with adult facilitators. Also, structured individual interviews were done with the adult facilitators from each health centre, and pre/post surveys were done with the youth researchers. This evaluation is the focus of this article.

Useful for ACT

Methods

A youth agency specializing in training youth to engage in research, evaluation and planning, partnered with a university to support a CBPR process through which youth would do research on school-based health centres. The purposes were to build youth capacity to do health-related research and also to improve health services for youth at these health centres.

The youth agency had already created a standardized curriculum in research, evaluation and planning, and this was implemented over 7-8 months. Teams of 2 to 6 youth were based at each health centre, and met with an adult facilitator from their health centre at least once a week. They also met with the youth agency staff once or twice a month to receive their curriculum training; training topics included topic selection, research methods, data collection strategies, tool development, data analysis and findings dissemination.

Challenges/Enablers
Challenges

- It took a significant amount of time for each youth team to select a topic of research, but after this choice was made there were sometimes external constraints around how realistic or useful a particular topic might be

- Youth in school often have other competing commitments such as extra-curricular activities; school-based vacations and holidays also presented challenges for the consistent meeting of the teams

- The project timeline was too limited to allow for action plans to be developed in response to the research findings

Enablers

none described.

Lessons learned

- Define up front the roles and responsibilities, and the levels of decision-making power of youth and adults involved

- Adult must understand their roles as allies, and receive coaching on how to function as a youth ally and surrender power to the youth

- Youth must receive training and preparation about the realities of social action and structural constraints

- Youth-led processes take longer because of the skills-building involved

- Youth need multiple opportunities to present and receive feedback on their work so that the value and importance of their contributions is continually recognized

- Social action must occur throughout the research process, rather than being a distant endpoint – otherwise the youth may disengage as the research draws to an end

- Realistic timelines must take into account other factors in youth's lives, such as school holidays and exams; one recommendation is that such projects should follow two-year, rather than one-year cycles

- There must be commitment from all partners to sustain and support the youth social action component that naturally follows CBPR

Categories

◇ Youth as co-researchers – high levels of youth participation

Abstract

Purpose: Half of new HIV infections worldwide occur among young people. Youth, particularly young women aged 15-29 years, represent a growing population to experience HIV. This study investigated HIV-positive youths' perceptions of, & experiences with, antiretroviral treatment.

Methods: A community-based, participatory approach was used to conduct a mixed methods research study. Thirty-four qualitative, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with HIV-positive youth (ages 12-24 years) in Ontario, Canada. Brief structured demographic surveys were also administered. A research team of HIV-positive youth, professionals, & researchers collaboratively analyzed the data for emerging themes.

Results: Four major themes emerged: Treatment knowledge: confusion and skepticism. Many participants did not understand, or believe in, antiretroviral treatment. Some youth on treatment did not understand why they were taking medications. Treatment decision-making: lack of choice and feeling emotionally unprepared. Some youth did not feel that they had choices about treatment, & others did not feel ready to make treatment decisions. Difficulties taking medications. Youth had problems with social routine disruption, feeling "different" & side effects. Many viewed costs of medications as a barrier to treatment. Inconsistent treatment adherence and treatment interruptions, which were common amongst participants.

Conclusions: Youth may need support for managing difficulties with treatments, such as side effects, social impacts, & adherence. Developmentally appropriate, empowerment-based treatment education may be helpful for HIV-positive youth. The availability of social programs to provide treatment access does not guarantee that youth will be aware of them. This may indicate a need for youth-specific outreach.

Level of youth participation

Some HIV+ youth were included on the research team, which also included other professionals such as doctors, specialists and academic professionals. The team was responsible for the research design and development of tools, and played a role in data analysis and dissemination as well. No discussion of youth-adult power dynamics.

Values and approach

- Community-Based Participatory Research approach, described as: a research process in which community agencies and HIV+ youth are considered full research partners

Practicalities

- Youth who were interviewed were paid $20

- Youth who were interviewed were ages 12 to 24

Evaluation

None described.

Useful for ACT

Methods

A stakeholder group of HIV+ youth and several professionals (in medicine, other academic areas) formed a research team that collaboratively developed the research design and tools. They also were responsible for the data analysis and dissemination.

The data collection, using qualitative semi-structured interviews with HIV+ youth, was done by a public health researcher. HIV+ youth were recruited for interviews through flyers, agencies, hospitals, health clinics, and word of mouth.

The stakeholder group reviewed a sub-sample of the interviews, once completed, in order to do a preliminary analysis and identify themes. The public health researcher created a preliminary coding framework that was then vetted by the research team. The team continually met with the researcher to discuss the relevance and implications of the data.

Challenges/Enablers

None described.

Lessons learned

None described. This article was much more focused on the outcomes of the research itself – the data on youth experiences with HIV treatment – than it was on the process of including HIV+ youth in the research team.

Veroff, S. (2002)
Participatory art research: Transcending barriers and creating knowledge and connection with young Inuit adults
American Behavioral Scientist, 45(8), 1273-1287

Categories

◇ Innovative/arts-based methods

Abstract

Participatory art research involves the process of research/action (art production) and reflection while seeking solutions to collective educational problems expressed, in this case, by a group of postsecondary Inuit students studying in Montreal, Quebec. The findings of the research, expressed through a critical ethnographical account, confirm that art used in this way can be a transformative, facilitating tool for stimulating relational knowledge and critical consciousness, making the research process a shared experience of collaboration and growth for all involved. The diversity expressed through this universal channel, artistic expression, becomes rich and illuminating and stimulates understanding about both identity and culture.

Level of youth participation

This research/art process was guided and structured by the researcher/art teacher, though she strove to create an open, flexible environment in which the students could have maximum input and participation.

Values and approach

- Youth voice (art as a means for the expression of those multiple voices, which are often marginalized – particularly in this group of Inuit youth; art as a way of exploring as-yet unexpressed or even unconscious emotions and ideas; art as a way of making experience public; art as a means of expression that may be easier than words for those for whom the research takes place in a second or third language)

- Researching across difference (the researcher seeing herself as an insider/outsider, interested in producing knowledge across difference; also recognizing difference within, and not just between, groups)

- Research as praxis (continual process of research and reflection)

- Anti-oppression (the research was motivated by the researcher/teacher's perception of unjust cultural control of the Inuit students within the educational system)

- Participatory Art Research approach, described as: as process of research/action – art production – and reflection on collective problems; a process that involves a raising of critical consciousness and shared growth among all involved; in this approach, art is data that is both a means and an end of the Participatory Art Research process

Practicalities

- Students involved were ages 18 to 25

- This project took place within the context of an existing art class

Evaluation

The process, including dialogue about the art created, was recorded in the researcher/teacher's field notes. She also continually conducted videotaped interviews with the students about how they were doing with the process. No details on the results of these.

Useful for ACT

Methods

Together with the students, a research problem was determined: difficulties in school and the relationship between these and individual and cultural identity. The researcher/teacher gave suggestions about how to go about researching/creating art about this problem, in terms of approaches and techniques. Students were also asked to periodically record in writing their reactions to the process.

A wide variety of artistic techniques were tried: drawing and painting, photography (which the students and teacher learned together), video-making, print-making, videotaped theatre, freewriting and storytelling. Other activities were excursions to cultural venues such as museums, theatres and cinemas. There was also casual socializing outside of these activities.

The production of art was the production of data. Together, the students and researcher/teacher would examine each piece of art and explore different levels of meaning in the art (looking at the emotional qualities communicated to the senses, analyzing the significance of the objects). During discussion, the researcher/teacher would often stimulate critical discussion by introducing topics of injustice and inequity. She would also stimulate thought on how the objects made the students feel, and how they related them to their past experiences.

Challenges

None described.

Enablers

The researcher/teacher's position as an art teacher, which to the students implied less of an authority figure and fewer academic credentials, helped to reduce barriers between her and the students

Lessons learned

- Relationship-building between the students and the researcher/teacher, and between the students themselves, was what made this project possible. Relationships were partly built through shared meals and informal conversation unrelated to the project.

- Trust took time to develop, but eventually the teacher/student hierarchy was broken down.

Walters, S., & East, L. (2001)
The cycle of homelessness in the lives of young mothers: The diagnostic phase of an action research project
Journal of Clinical Nursing, 10(2), 171-179

Categories

◇ Innovative/arts-based methods

◇ Youth as co-researchers – high levels of youth participation

◇ Focus on empowerment

Abstract

This paper presents the findings of the first stage of an action research project designed to explore the experience of repeated homelessness in the lives of young women. An action research strategy was selected because it offered a framework within which to work with and for rather than on this vulnerable group of service users. The women participating in the research developed a conceptual model that captured the essence of their experience, which they named 'Our Cycle'. They also proposed a system for service delivery, 'From trauma to recovery: a nonprofessional model'. The diagnostic phase of the action research has thus resulted in a sound theoretical and practical framework to guide the implementation and evaluation stages of the project, currently being funded through the United Kingdom Department of Health's Health Action Zone initiative.

Level of youth participation

The research process was initiated by adult researchers and its structure developed by them as well. The discussions themselves and the subsequent analysis and development of next steps were more collaborative and the young women began to take more ownership of the project as it progressed. They became particularly engaged when the process moved towards action. The young women participated strongly in results dissemination.

Values and approach

• Action Research approach, understood to: provide a means with which to work for and with, rather than on, this group; a collaborative and potentially empowering process, especially if it focuses on the "action" component rather than the "research" aspect

Practicalities

• The three young women who participated were all under the age of 21 and had children under 5 years of age

Evaluation

Each meeting was audio-recorded and transcribed in order to guide the following meeting's discussion and also to provide a source of data on the process. No description of any formal evaluation after this first phase of the action research process.

Useful for ACT

Methods

Three young women were recruited from the primary researcher's present and past caseload. Four weekly discussion groups were held, facilitated by the primary researcher and a coworker with experience in group work.

For the first meeting, questions were prepared by the researcher drawing from existing literature on experiences of homelessness. For the following two meetings, issues that had emerged the previous week were explored through discussion. Each week's discussion was audio-recorded and transcribed for the participants' viewing. The final meeting served to clarify and validate the researcher's interpretation of data that had been collected so far, and also to identify potential actions for moving forward with this research.

The young women themselves were able to take charge of shaping both the analysis of the data and next steps. They created a model of care/support based on peer experience using a "Reality Worker" that they proposed could help young mothers like themselves break out of the "cycle" of homelessness. The young women ended up making a video about their experiences, presenting the findings of the group at conferences and to groups of health and social service professionals.

Challenges

- Given the responsibilities associated with raising young children, it was difficult to coordinate a meeting time that would work for everyone – as a result only three women ended up participating

- The researcher ended up becoming deeply drawn into the stories of the young women through the group process, and acknowledged personal bias in how she was interpreting them. She utilized a reflective journal to help process this experience.

Enablers

- The group approach allowed the young women to express themselves in their own language

Lessons learned

- The process became empowering when the young women, together with the researcher, started to think about steps they could take to act on the data that had been collected so far. Empowerment was fostered through the collaborative nature of the activity of shaping the future development of the project. The young women were particularly focused on and motivated by the idea of helping other young mothers in similar situations to theirs.

Categories

◇ Innovative/arts-based methods

Abstract

Photovoice is a participatory action research strategy which can contribute to youth mobilization for community change. The strategy can enable youth to (1) record & vivify their community's strengths & concerns; (2) promote critical dialogue & knowledge about community issues through group discussion of photographs; & (3) reach policy makers. Following a description of the photovoice methodology, this article briefly highlights ten projects in which youth used photovoice to represent, advocate, & enhance community health & well-being.

Level of youth participation

This article describes the photovoice methodology, as opposed to a particular project. In general, this is not a youth-led process and adult facilitation plays a strong part. Each project will differ in the level of control that is given to youth at each stage of the process.

Values and approach

- Participation (in influencing policy, through the accessible nature of photographs to policy-makers; means for democratic participation of marginalized citizens, through the accessible nature of photography itself)

- Consciousness-raising (of communities through critical discussion of the photographs taken)

- Photovoice described as a Participatory Action Research (PAR) strategy that has been used in needs assessment, asset-mapping and evaluation; as a PAR strategy, it includes the involvement of youth in all aspects of the research, a co-learning process between youth, researchers and policymakers, a critically reflective process, an enabling process, and a balance between research, action and evaluation

Practicalities

- The authors suggest that 7 to 10 participants in a photovoice group is ideal for discussion.

- Projects using photovoice have used one to six rounds of participants taking photographs and then meeting to discuss them.

- This paper briefly describes ten different photovoice projects, each of which targeted a different group of youth participants (in terms of age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, etc.)

Evaluation

None described.

Useful for ACT

Methods

A nine-step strategy has been developed for using photovoice to mobilize community action:

- Recruit a group of sympathetic policy makers or community leaders to serve as an advisory board to the project, as they will be well placed to implement the changes suggested by the participants.

- Recruit a group of participants. This step could take place before step 1, which would allow participants to have a say in who should make up the advisory board.

- Present the photovoice methodology to participants and facilitate a discussion of the ethics associated with photography.

- Obtain informed consent – including that of parents of minors.

- Pose initial themes for taking pictures. This can be done by the group as well (they can come up with the themes).

- Distribute cameras to participants and review how to use the camera. Different types of cameras have been used in different photovoice projects.

- Provide time for the participants to take pictures – the authors suggest one week for participants to submit their photographs to the facilitator.

- Meet to discuss the photographs and identify themes. This includes individual participants selecting photographs and contextualizing them or telling a story about them. The contextualizing/storytelling follows the mnemonic SHOWeD:

  - What do you See here?
  - What's really Happening here?
  - How does this relate to Our lives?
  - Why does this situation, concern or strength exist?
  - What can we Do about it?

The participants then codify the themes/issues that arise from this discussion.

- Plan a format with participants for how the photographs and stories will be shared with policymakers and community leaders. Projects have typically organized a slideshow or exhibition.

Challenges/Enablers
Challenges

- In some projects, other issues and stressors in youth's lives such as personal and family crises prevented them from participating fully

Enablers

- In intergenerational projects such as one described in which youth and policymakers were both participants in photovoice, the medium of photography was more easy for youth to adopt than for the policymakers – this helped to even the uneven playing field between the youth and adults

Lessons learned

- Allowing participants to use an open-ended approach in which they chose what to photograph without any guiding theme was useful for arriving at an overall community assessment; providing participants with a specific theme such as violence prevention or sexual health was useful when funding dictated a particular focus.

- Photovoice allows youth and adults benefit in learning about one another in spite of their usual insularity from each other: youth gain from the process of critiquing policies created by adults, while adults benefit from recognizing the contributions of youth to the policy-making process.

- Project facilitators working with younger aged youth found that it was necessary to incorporate some opportunities for physical movement and play.

- There are a number of ethical and consent concerns with the photovoice process (see article for full discussion); consent must be received from participants in order to participate, from any subjects who were photographed, and from participants in order to have their photographs exhibited. Also, safety is paramount and must be emphasized to all participants – that they should not compromise their safety in order to take photographs.

Warming, H. (2006)

"How can you know? You're not a foster child": Dilemmas and possibilities of giving voice to children in foster care

Children, Youth and Environments, 16(2), 28-50

Categories

◇ Innovative/arts-based methods

◇ Youth as co-researchers – high levels of youth participation

◇ Focus on empowerment

◇ Youth participation in evaluation of youth services

Abstract

Based on Axel Honneth's Theory of Recognition and an empirical action research project entitled "Bornetinget" (Children's Parliament), conducted in Denmark by the author, this article discuss dilemmas and possibilities of giving voice to children in foster care. The Bornetinget project aimed to give voice to foster children so that their knowledge about "the life as a child in foster care" could find its way to social workers and foster parents as well as politicians, thus influencing, democratizing and qualifying social work with children and youth in foster care. "Bornetinget" was established with a core group of 15 foster children, aged 10-13, and a web-based "foster children's public forum." This article focuses on learning about participation from the Bornetinget experience, both as a model of participatory research practice and for the insights it provides in relation to how we understand participation in research and social work practice.

Level of youth participation

The 15 children involved began as interviewees and all ended up acting as collaborators and co-researchers; the level of their participation increased over time. The openness in the project allowed for the children's contributions and suggestions to be taken up, including suggestions about how they could participate further.

Values and approach

• Participation (of children in the decisions that affect their lives, in the production of knowledge about them; consultation)

• Empowerment (countering the notion that "extremely vulnerable" children cannot participate in research)

• Voice (children as experts, as key informants in research; being valued)

• Participatory Research approach, which includes: children as co-researchers; necessitating "child-friendly" methods and tools; that recognizes the contribution of the children who participate

Practicalities

• 15 foster children involved, ages 10 to 13

• The children were compensated with gifts and with acknowledgement in the researcher's book.

Evaluation

None described.

Methods

The researcher used open-ended individual interviews, group discussions, and a web-based forum. These were followed by collaborative analysis.

The interviews took place using an inspirational guide produced by the researcher in collaboration with two young adults who had formerly been in foster care. The researcher made the interviews very open and invited the young respondents to guide the discussion, to talk about the issues that were most important to them and to veto any questions that they weren't comfortable answering or found unimportant.

The group discussion included the same 15 children, but divided into two groups. The groups were provided with themes produced by the researcher.

For the web-based forum, current and former foster children were invited to participate either by writing, calling or texting. They could write whatever they wanted, and each week there was a new theme for debate and "storytelling." Each theme was chosen in collaboration with the focus group, and was introduced accompanied by a few quotes from the interviews. Due to the success of the forum as a space for foster children to share and learn from each other, the decision was made to keep it open rather than shutting it down after ten weeks as originally planned.

In terms of results dissemination, the researcher wrote a book, and the results were also communicated to politicians, social workers, foster parents, and politicians (not described what format or who was involved) and through conferences. The children collaborated on a children's edition of the book

Challenges

- While the original group of 15 children volunteered themselves to assist with the analysis of the data from the forum, they were not very engaged with the task itself (there were 200 entries, and some of the children had difficulty reading).

- When the work became a group project, there was less recognition of each individual child's contributions.

Enablers

- The group discussions were a jumping off point for the children to become more involved as co-researchers – the group process itself motivated the children to work together in order to make the voices of foster children heard. See more below in Lessons Learned on the group process.

- The theoretical openness of the research allowed for the study to shift course, as the children took more of a leadership role and took the research in a different direction.

Lessons learned

- The group process allowed for the personal to become political: hearing other children's experiences motivated others to disclose information they had not talked about during the interviews, including very sensitive topics such as violence and abuse. The children were empowered through the group process because they felt that they were not alone.

- The web-based forum didn't necessarily answer the researcher's questions, but provided a space where the children, as co-researchers, could ask their own questions and do their own research. It became very much a space owned by them.

- When the children were treated like experts, they began to take on the role of co-researchers. They became very enthusiastic about informing people about foster children's perspectives.

- As the analysis was a bit of an academic exercise and didn't appeal to the children, there needs to be an openness to allow for a different kind of analysis, one that the children are able to offer and that will be recognized as a contribution to the research.

Wilson, N., Minkler, M., Dasho, S., Carrillo, R., Wallerstein, N., & Garcia, D. (2006)
Training students as facilitators in the Youth Empowerment Strategies (YES!) project
Journal of Community Practice, 14(1), 201-217

AND

Wilson, N., Dasho, S., Martin, A. C., Wallerstein, N., Wang, C. C., & Minkler, M. (2007).
Engaging young adolescents in social action through photovoice: The Youth Empowerment Strategies (YES!) project
Journal of Early Adolescence, 27(2), 241-261

Categories

◇ Innovative/arts-based methods

◇ Focus on empowerment

◇ Civic participation/social action

Abstract

This article describes the training of students as facilitators for the Youth Empowerment Strategies (YES!) project designed to promote problem-solving, social action & civic participation among underserved elementary school youth in West Contra Costa County, California. This project involved 160 fifth grade students in after-school activities which identified their capacities & strengths in ways which aimed to decrease rates of alcohol, tobacco & other drug use & other risky behaviors. The article describes the recruitment & training of high school students & their graduate student counterparts as facilitators in this university-community partnership, & discusses the implications for other youth-focused community-based projects.

Abstract

The Youth Empowerment Strategies (YES!) project is an afterschool empowerment program and research project for underserved early adolescents. Central to YES! is an empowerment intervention that provides early adolescents with opportunities for civic engagement with other youth around issues of shared concern in their schools and neighborhoods. This article specifically focuses on the use of Photovoice as a promising way to engage youth in social change as they take photos capturing strengths and issues in their environment and use these as the basis of critical dialogue and collective action plans. Adding to a growing body of information on using Photovoice, this article reports how early adolescents in the YES! afterschool program experienced the Photovoice process, moving from photography and writing to initiate group-designed social action projects. Recommendations are offered for others engaged in empowerment work with early adolescents.

Level of youth participation

The target of this project was younger youth, who were viewed more as objects that would benefit from this intervention in terms of their levels of empowerment and civic participation. However, older youth (high school students) participated as facilitators for the younger youth. In most cases, the younger youth were able to select and follow through with the social action project of their choice, although the facilitators did sometimes put limits on the ideas of the younger youth when they deemed their projects too ambitious.

Values and approach

• Strengths-based (building on the existing capacities of youth – particularly the high school youth hired as co-facilitators in order to capitalize on their knowledge of local youth culture and the community in general)

- Empowerment (creating conditions in which youth become empowered to act on issues of importance to them; empowerment education was one of four major themes of the co-facilitators' training)

- Intergenerational (having university and high school-age youth working with elementary school youth)

- Action for social change (each group of elementary school students were to choose, plan and execute a social action project; this aspect is also referred to as civic engagement in the articles)

Practicalities

- High school and graduate students were employed as co-facilitators to work with elementary school students over three years; they were trained for 60 hours, mostly on weekends

- As an additional incentive for the younger youth to participate, additional film and processing were provided (aside from that necessary for the Photovoice projects)

Evaluation

Evaluation was done in terms of how the fifth grade students benefited from this intervention (i.e. positive outcomes like increased self-efficacy and engagement in community issues). There was also an evaluation of the facilitator training, assessing the readiness of the facilitators and identifying areas of lower confidence.

Useful for ACT

Methods

The specific training topics of the facilitator training are listed in the article Training Students as Facilitators in the Youth Empowerment Strategies (YES!) Project, and the training manual is available upon request. The training goals were defined as:

- understanding the rationale and goals of the project,

- experiencing program processes first hand (e.g., dialogue and Photovoice),

- learning facilitation and group management skills,

- understanding expectations for the content of the first weeks of sessions and

- developing a comfort level and skill in working collaboratively with a co-facilitator.

(Training students as facilitators in the Youth Empowerment Strategies (YES!) project, p. 209)

This project was modeled on the Adolescent Social Action Program (ASAP), which was created in Albuquerque, New Mexico. This model operated from the early 1980s through the late 1990s in over 30 middle and high schools in vulnerable neighborhoods, using an empowerment education approach.

To recruit the younger youth who would be the objects of the intervention, they made presentations in all fifth-grade classrooms in particular high-risk schools. Students volunteered to participate and provided written assent for themselves and from their caregivers. In the four schools that participated, students were assigned to same-gender groups of 6-10 students. These groups met with co-facilitators weekly for 90-minute after-school sessions, for approximately 25 sessions. The curriculum of the sessions is included in the article.

In the classroom sessions, the initial foci were on teambuilding and photography, while the second portion of the sessions focused on critical dialogue and identification and execution of a social action project.

Techniques used included Photovoice and community asset and risk mapping, for the purposes of a social action project in each group's school community (year 1, the year discussed in these articles). The project is to last three years in total, with year 2 allowing for an expansion of the scope of projects to local neighbourhoods, and year 3 involving a partnership between the student groups and an identified local leader in order to execute a social action project.

Description of the Photovoice method used:

"The Photovoice approach provides community members with cameras and training in how to use them in order to take pictures that convey their "images of the world," including both the strengths and the problems experienced in their local communities. Under the leadership of a trained facilitator, the pictures are used to generate group dialogue during which participants discuss their pictures often using the mnemonic SHOWeD (Shaffer, 1983). What do you See here? What's really Happening here? How does this relate to Our lives? What can we Do about it? Formation and implementation of an action plan is a central part of the Photovoice method" (Training students as facilitators in the Youth Empowerment Strategies (YES!) project, pp. 205-206)

Challenges

In facilitation:

- The facilitators had trouble determining and prioritizing activities for each session; as a result, detailed weekly curriculums were developed. These provided some standardization, which was in contradiction with the initial intention of allowing each group's strengths and capacities to determine the direction of the sessions.

- The graduate student co-facilitators clearly took the lead, even though their high school student co-facilitators were supposed to have equal power.

- There was insufficient time for the completion of the curriculum and social action projects.

- There was inconsistency in the quality of the facilitation: some facilitators were less skilled in facilitating discussion around critical thinking.

Enablers

None described.

Lessons learned

- Standardized activities for the youth were not desirable. Objectives and desired outcomes of each activity need to be well understood by facilitators so that they could adjust them as necessary

- Younger youth require physical activity and play

- There needs to be an emphasis on recreational time (i.e. pizza parties) as celebrations rather than rewards

- There was a real challenge for facilitators in terms of balancing group management and group empowerment. The discussion of certain techniques to use when these situations came up (i.e. reminding everyone of the ground rules) was useful for facilitators.

- There needs to be sufficient time allotted for all of the topics to be covered and for the social action project to be executed.

- Because critical thinking is not generally fostered in mainstream education, the younger youth sometimes had difficulty generating deep, critical analyses during the Photovoice process. Some also took issue with what they perceived to be "schoolwork" – activities related to discussion and writing. The researchers concluded that the Photovoice process needs to be adapted to accommodate students' lack of experience with critical thinking, negative attitudes towards school, and resistance to writing.

- Group dynamics were an issue during the sessions; some solutions were to separate the youth into two smaller groups with each co-facilitator taking one group, or breaking the group up into dyads and triads in order to accomplish tasks.

- The younger youth sometimes came up with projects that were too large for the scope of the program; facilitators would guide them towards projects that were more realistic and "winnable" so that there could be a sense of power and accomplishment at the end.

Winton, A. (2007)
Using 'participatory' methods with young people in contexts of violence: Reflections from Guatemala
Bulletin of Latin American Research, 26(4), 497-515

Categories

◇ Innovative/arts-based methods

◇ Critical perspectives on engaging youth in research

Abstract

This article is based on research carried out with young people in Guatemala City, in communities with a high incidence of youth gang violence. The demands of working with a traditionally 'disempowered' social group, youth, and in situations of violence, provide a timely opportunity for methodological reflection. The central objective is to discuss the means through which perceptions and experiences of gang violence were reported during the research. It deals in particular with the relative benefits of Participatory Appraisal methods in research with young people in situations of violence. Empirical material from Guatemala is used to reflect on the particular ways in which violence is variously revealed and explained. It also comments on the ways in which violence, in turn, impacted upon the conduct of the research itself.

Level of youth participation

Youth participated only as respondents in discussion groups; however, they were treated as experts and the discussions were open to as to allow for their priorities and interests to emerge.

Values and approach

- Participation (providing participants with a range of means of expression, to allow for maximum participation by all; participatory methodologies as more ethical and action-oriented than traditional methodologies)

- Empowerment (use of inclusive approach in order to transfer power from traditional "experts" to local ones; valuing of local knowledge)

Discussion of the Participatory Appraisal approach, the main components of which are: prioritisation of local knowledge, awareness of local context and respectful behaviour and attitudes of the outsider/researcher. The outsider/researcher is a participant rather than an expert; the local participants, ideally, set the priorities of the research; the approach allows for adaptability and flexibility.

Note on the approach: the author chooses not to label her research with a particular approach due to the limitations of any approach; rather, she takes on some of the methods without naming an approach

Practicalities

None described.

Evaluation

This article is concerned specifically with evaluating the use of specific participatory techniques – group diagramming and diagram-based discussion groups – with youth.

Useful for ACT

Methods

The researcher facilitated group diagramming and discussion with youth participants in two low-income communities in Guatemala City. The majority of the 61 group discussions took place in schools and youth groups. Some groups were mixed gender, other were divided by gender.

Rather than define a theme for discussion, the groups began with problem listings. The problems were then prioritized through discussion and voting. The themes that emerged from these discussions were then analyzed using tools such as causal flow diagrams, institutional mappings, community mappings drawn by participants, and thematic pie charts. Different types of diagrams are included in the article.

Participants who wished to could go on to be interviewed. While it is mentioned that some interviews and surveys took place, as well as a photography exercise, none of these are described in the article.

In the end the research was cut short due to violence: the researcher was exposed to a gunfight between rival gangs.

Challenges

- Group diagramming, while visual, does include a significant of writing and thus limits the participation of those with literacy issues

- Group diagramming, which can involve coming to a kind of consensus, can homogenize opinions and limit the diversity of voices heard

Enablers

- The process of drawing and diagramming with the group enhanced and facilitated the discussion: there was a high level of involvement, and the physical presence of the ideas on paper led to reflection and analysis on the part of participants

- The mixed gender groups allowed for gender issues to emerge naturally in discussion

- Managing group dynamics was easier in the context of an activity than in the context of regular discussion

- In groups where the researcher already had a relationship with the youth, the discussion was more open and informal.

- In groups that met more than once, comfort and ease increased over time

Lessons learned

The techniques used in approaches such as Participatory Appraisal do not automatically lead to empowerment; if research is to be called participatory, then it must be participatory from beginning to end, and particularly in the data analysis phase.

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