

I Wish This Were a Poem of Practices of Participatory Research

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The practices of participatory action research (PAR), as this collection eloquently demonstrates, have arisen in many parts of the world. This chapter is drawn from my own roots, that part of the PAR family tree which found its early expression in Tanzania between the mid-1960s through the mid-1970s. These particular expressions joined with Latin American traditions and those from Asia and elsewhere and in turn nurtured the early International Participatory Research Network which was associated with the International Council for Adult Education between 1976 and 1991. I define participatory research as an integrated three-pronged process of social investigation, education and action designed to support those with less power in their organizational or community settings. It is worth noting that my own initial work and that of much of the early participatory research network were done outside the confines of the university. The particular stream of what some have called 'liberatory' participatory research has arisen from community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations or civil society. This is important as the development of practices within a politically engaged social movement setting often call for quite different responses than do practices arising from university-based research. This chapter must be carefully read with those of Marja-Liisa Swantz and Orlando Fals Borda in particular, who were our intellectual pioneers and guiding spirits in this remarkable journey, with the contributions of Rajesh Tandon who has been a close colleague in this work for so many years and the thoughts of Peter Park, with whom I have worked since 1979.

This chapter briefly notes some of the early influences on my own work and thinking. I draw on these roots for a review of some key ideas which might underscore our contemporary practices of participatory research. I also briefly outline several current challenges that I am dealing with in my own understanding of participatory research. This contribution is written in appreciation of the creative energies and friendship of those mentioned and others, with whom I have learned so much: I thank

especially Ted Jackson, dian marino and Deborah Barndt of Canada, Yusuf Kassam of Tanzania, Francisco Vio Grossi of Chile, John Gaventa and Juliet Merrifield of England and the USA, of Patricia McGuire of the USA.

Early Influences of Participatory Research

I worked in Tanzania from 1970 to 1974 at the Institute of Adult Education of the University of Dar es Salaam. As the Research Officer I was involved in a wide variety of research and evaluation studies related to the activities of the Institute itself. My responsibilities included teaching research and evaluation methods in the diploma course for adult educators as well as providing leadership for the evaluation design and implementation of many of the large-scale adult education programmes that were conducted at the time by the Institute of Adult Education (IAE). Among those programmes were the Mtu Ni Afya (People are Health) mass radio study group campaigns of 1973 which created 75,000 community-based research and action study groups throughout the nation.

The most profound early influences on many of us working in Tanzania during those days were the ideas, strategies and programmes of the Tanzanian government of the day, articulated most effectively by the late President Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere. Nyerere, himself a former teacher, had written much about the capacity of education to unchain people just as it had been used by the colonial powers to enchain a people. The philosophy of Ujamaa and Self-reliance, concepts of what we might call today Afro-centric development and local economic development were open challenges to the way that the rich countries saw the world. Tanzania and Tanzanians were in so many ways telling the world that the 'emperor has no clothes'. Nyerere and a generation of articulate and gifted leaders such as Paul Mhaiki in the field of adult education challenged all who were working in Tanzania, national and expatriate alike,

to look through a different lens to understand education, agriculture, development, history, culture and eventually for some of us even research and evaluation methods. We were all encouraged to 'meet the masses more' and while on a day-to-day basis this was difficult to understand, over time many of us were profoundly transformed.

Links with Latin American traditions in activist research came to many of us through the work of Paulo Freire. Although the roots of participatory research pre-dated Paulo's visit by several years, it was exciting to find that the vision and concerns that many of us had found in Tanzania had been expressed in very similar ways by Paulo and others from Latin America. In September 1971 we had a visit by Paulo Freire, sponsored by the Maryknoll Sisters, an order of activist Christian Sisters who worked largely in educational settings in Tanzania. Our Institute for Adult Education was responsible for organizing that visit and for working with him during his stay. One of the things that we asked him to talk about were his ideas about research methods. The text of his talk was transcribed and used in the first ever issue of the IAE's publication series called *Studies in Adult Education*. Here are some passages from that 1971 presentation about research methods, which was distributed as simply 'A Talk by Paulo Freire':

First of all I must underline the point that the central question that I think that we have to discuss here is not the methodological one. In my point of view . . . it is necessary to perceive in a very clear way the ideological background which determines the very methodology. It is impossible for me to think about neutral education, neutral methodology, neutral science or even neutral God.

In social science it is easy to see that the ideology determines the methodology (of searching) or of knowing.

I think that adult education in Tanzania should have as one of its main tasks to invite people to believe in themselves. It should invite people to believe that they have knowledge. The people must be challenged to discover their historical existence through the critical analysis of their cultural production: their art and their music. One of the characteristics of colonization is that in order for the colonizers to oppress the people easily they convinced themselves that the colonized have a mere biological life and never an historical existence. (Freire, 1971: 1, 5, 5)

I have elsewhere described how my own journey towards participatory research was most dramatically pushed forward through mistakes and failures for which I was responsible during my early days with the Institute of Adult Education (Hall and Kidd, 1978: 5). One of my first tasks for the Institute was to do a survey of adult education needs for the Ministry of Adult Education which was setting up new programmes in all of the districts. In brief I found that

the survey approach which I had used did not produce any useful results. In fact I found that I learned more about what rural Tanzanians were interested in learning by sitting several evenings just listening to stories in the community centre than I had through a more seemingly scientific approach. And while I did not 'see the light' at any single moment, the accumulation of experiences and influences gradually led me like many others to thinking about knowledge and knowledge creation in new ways.

As mentioned earlier, the work of Marja-Liisa Swantz was another important influence. Marja-Liisa was at that time a social scientist attached to the Bureau for Research on Land Use and Productivity (BRALUP) of the University of Dar es Salaam. She had developed an engaged and community development approach to research between 1965 and 1970 primarily in work done with women living in coastal rural areas of Tanzania. Her background in anthropology gave her an appreciation for cultural production at community levels and an understanding of participant observation. Her commitment to egalitarian and participatory change drew her into the forms of engaged and activist research which influenced many of us. During the early 1970s, she and a group of students from the University of Dar es Salaam, including Kemal Mustapha who was later to become the African co-ordinator for the international participatory research network, opened up a series of projects in many parts of Tanzania. Although Orlando Fals Borda is most clearly identified with first using the term 'participatory action research', Marja-Liisa Swantz had earlier used those same words in several of her talks to the university community in Tanzania as well. In one of her early working papers she notes:

Research strategies which developing countries such as Tanzania have followed have generally been patterned in the Universities of developed countries . . .

In planning research on a subject related to development one has to first answer some questions: Who are the beneficiaries of this research? What are the aims? Who is going to be involved? What approach and methods of research should be used so that the research would bring the greatest possible gains for development? . . .

Research and researcher can become agents of development and change in the process while the research is being done . . . (Swantz, 1975: 1-4)

I left Tanzania for the University of Sussex in late 1974. At the Institute for Development Studies at Sussex I found that people in many other countries were thinking along similar lines to those of us in Tanzania. Francisco Vio Grossi in Chile, Rajesh Tandon in India, even researchers in England and Europe. The connection between research, politics and action had been opened up, never to be closed again. It was during that period at Sussex that I compiled a special issue of the journal *Convergence*,

the journal of the International Council for Adult Education, on the theme of what I labelled 'Participatory Research'. That term was used because it seemed to be the best common description of the various approaches that were described within the issue. While I had begun to learn about the long traditions in Europe of action research, and Marja-Liisa Swantz had been using 'participant research' to describe this approach for several years, the choice of the term 'participatory research' was simply made as a descriptive term for a collection of varied approaches which shared a participatory ethos.

The International Participatory Research Network

The first idea that something like an international network might be possible or welcome came with the response to the publication of the special 1975 issue of *Convergence*. The adult education community and related community development activists bought all the copies for the first time in the history of the journal. Requests for copies poured in from all over the world and the small item in my lead article inviting persons who were interested in exchanging information about their activities went from a trickle to a stream to a river. It was clear that many people in the majority world and people working with or for marginalized persons in the rich countries were actively engaged in research projects which were very different from the at-the-time dominant positivist traditions in the research communities.

The next push towards creating a network came at the First World Assembly of the International Council for Adult Education which took place in Dar es Salaam in June 1976. By this time I was working in Canada for the ICAE and responsible for the organizing of that conference. One of the conference sessions provided a series of critiques of the then orthodox research methodologies. Helen Callaway of Oxford University, Kathleen Rockhill of UCLA in the USA and the late Madan Handa of India and Canada were among those presenting papers. In the debates and committees which arose from the Dar es Salaam conference, a recommendation was made to the world adult education community that, 'adult educators should be given the opportunity to learn about and share their experiences in participatory research' (Hall and Kidd, 1978). During that World Assembly several groups of young researchers had a chance to visit Marja-Liisa Swantz, Kemal Mustapha and others, and see the work in which they were engaged.

Upon returning from the Dar es Salaam conference, the ICAE agreed to support the development of an international project, which later became an international network of participatory research. The network was administratively based within the ICAE in Toronto, Canada, but was co-ordinated by activist

researchers, all of whom were working outside formal academic institutions in a variety of places throughout the world. Rajesh Tandon of India co-ordinated the network for most of its existence. Our team in Toronto chose as a matter of principle to become engaged in the struggles for justice and learning in Canada as a precondition to being able to network on a global basis. We did not want to be just another development network based in the rich countries of the north making our living from the poor of the south. Several of us working for the creation of an international network were fortunate to participate in the 1987 Cartagena conference organized by Orlando Fals Borda, which opened us up to an exciting generation of Latin American and other activist researchers.

Principles of Participatory Research

The first meeting of the International Participatory Research Network in 1978 produced the following definitional statement

- 1 PR involves a whole range of powerless groups of people – the exploited, the poor, the oppressed, the marginal.
- 2 It involves the full and active participation of the community in the entire research process.
- 3 The subject of the research originates in the community itself and the problem is defined, analysed and solved by the community.
- 4 The ultimate goal is the radical transformation of social reality and the improvement of the lives of the people themselves. The beneficiaries of the research are the members of the community.
- 5 The process of participatory research can create a greater awareness in the people of their own resources and mobilize them for self-reliant development.
- 6 It is a more scientific method or research in that the participation of the community in the research process facilitates a more accurate and authentic analysis of social reality.
- 7 The researcher is a committed participant and learner in the process of research, i.e., a militant rather than a detached observer. (Hall and Kidd, 1978: 5)

The Practices of Participatory Research

In my own approach to working with others around the practices of participatory research I have tried to avoid getting drawn into discussions about methods and techniques. It has been my experience that the best way to think about working in these ways is to approach participatory research as a political or philosophical phenomena. Susan Smith, Tim Pyrch and some of my other Canadian colleagues write

about participatory research as a 'way of life' (Smith et al., 1997). What I like about their approach is that it firmly locates the work in a values context, a context of continuity and a context of engagement. Participatory research is fundamentally a discourse about the role of knowledge and learning within the varieties of struggles in our communities for respect, fairness, a living wage, health for our families, clean air to breathe and safe water to drink. It is about whose knowledge counts, creating information for social change, recognizing indigenous and ancient knowledges and learning to be allies. This section therefore reflects what I have found to be helpful ways of supporting individuals and groups who would like to work in these ways.

1 Participatory research is a natural and common way of working in communities or social movements

It is important to underscore the fact that participatory research is a quite common way for women and men working in community-based or social movement contexts to work together. Women in the early days of the women's movement experienced a set of processes which we might now refer to as participatory research. They were certainly engaged in a process of social investigation in understanding gender privileges and penalties in their collective lives, they were learning together in an educational experience and they were taking action, at a minimum in their own lives, but often as part of wider women's movement or institutional contexts. The labour movement in areas such as workers' health and safety has long been a practitioner of participatory research methods, for example when workers were asked to name the ways in which machines, working conditions or production processes cause stress or strain. This kind of worker-led investigation, education and action is participatory research even if it is not called that. The same can be seen in nearly all social movement contexts around the world. Aboriginal peoples' recovery of their own traditions to help in making claims for land that has been taken away from them, most often by white settler movements, is an example of participatory research.

It is important to stress the fact that the 'invention' of participatory research is not something done by researchers, educators or even community activists. Arguably, participatory research as a practice has always existed, whenever farmers, mothers, workers, the poor, the 'pushed out' have struggled collectively to understand their contexts, learn about their worlds and take action to survive or, from time to time, to carve out some gains against the more powerful in our worlds.

What has changed is that persons like ourselves have increasingly recognized that the natural processes of knowledge creation being undertaken

within social, environmental and political action settings can also be understood within what we call 'research'. The reason that it is important to address this early in the discussion about practice is that those of us who identify as researchers in one way or another may often do our best work by validating the participatory research processes that are already underway within a given community or social movement context. Another critical role which some of us might play could be to strengthen the documentational aspects of an already existing knowledge-creating process. Outside researchers are not a requirement for participatory research and much of the early work which many of us undertook in the 1970s and 1980s was done to lend the weight of our words to an understanding of research that might be capable of breaking the monopoly of expert-based or academic-based research.

2 The question of methods: on song, dance and poetry and discussion

Outside the more formal strictures of the academy, knowledge is in fact created in a myriad of socially constructed and creative ways. Participatory research is among other things about the social construction of knowledge, the collective construction of knowledge. When looking for inspiration around methods of participatory research we need to take our clues from the creative and collectively constructed practices which abound in our societies and movements. The past 25 years of participatory research has drawn some of its richest inspirations from the world of the arts: of song and dance and poetry and discussion.

A recent example was the production of the collective mural completed as part of the North American Alliance for Popular and Adult Education Gathering in Tucson, Arizona in February 1999. Michael Schwartz, of the Tucson-based Arts Collective, facilitated 100 or so popular educators in the production of a collective and historic analysis of the popular education movement in a permanent mural form within a period of three days. The specific techniques involved brainstorming a collective vision of a mural, identifying images which would represent various social movements, projecting the images on the canvas, tracing the images in charcoal and then painting the images, thus filling in a large six foot by 22 foot canvas mural. The mural created a way for persons of all ages and all levels of experience to work together. It drew on everyone's skills and energies and wonderfully documented some 100 years of activism and adult education. Rather than in book or print form, the social movement history created collectively was represented in the form of a canvas mural that now travels from conference to conference and 'speaks' eloquently of work both done and to be done.

The late dian marino, a founding member of the original participatory research group, was the inspiration for some of the most creative approaches to participatory research. Her writings were captured so very beautifully in the book on her work by Ferne Crystal and Robert Clarke (1997). In one of dian's early publications, 'Drawing from action for action' (marino, no date), dian documented the use of drawing for collective analysis in a process called the 'Ah Hah' process, a by now well-established practice in popular education and participatory research in Canada. This practice is designed to facilitate collective analysis of contemporary contexts for action in a given organization, movement, community or sector. It calls for a large blank sheet of paper to be placed on the wall. Participants in the group are asked to discuss in twos or threes the key economic, political and environmental factors at play in their given context. Groups are asked to think of images which represent these factors or interests which are then drawn on the sheet. Participants are then asked to draw lines between the images which indicate the connections between the various interests or factors at work. The resulting collective drawing is then discussed and analysed. In my own experiences of working in this way, rich and contextually nuanced understandings of a given situation are achieved in several hours by the group working together. Insights are often discovered which escape much more time-intensive and textually dense situational research or needs assessment processes. In neither of the above processes are individuals' artistic or drawing abilities any sort of limitation.

Popular theatre is another method used in many parts of the world within a participatory research framework. The earliest description of the potential for participatory research in this format was written up by Ross Kidd and Martin Byram (no date) as a working paper of the participatory research network based on their experiences in various parts of Africa.

Another personal experience at a workshop prior to the People's Summit in Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1996 involved the use of poetry to produce a framework which the Atlantic Popular Education Group used to help them guide some of their interventions during that large-scale public education and political action process. A group of popular educators were given the task, within one hour, of coming up with a poem or set of poems which could express the vision for the educational intervention which was desired. We took our chairs to a corner of the large room and began with a series of warm-up exercises sharing first sounds, then words and then random phrases to get our poetic energies flowing. We then shared random images that framed the events which were to follow. We pulled it all together in a set of poems which we wrote by contributing lines one by one around the circle. When we were asked to read our work at the end of the workshop, we received enthusiastic applause.

My point in sharing these very brief stories is that if we are interested in supporting, facilitating or creating new processes for collective knowledge generation, learning and action, we can look to the communities and the movements for inspiration and ideas on how to do participatory research, often with better results than trying to read a handbook on research, even a handbook on action research! At the same time we need not dismiss some of the excellent ways of working that the more formal academic community has evolved for supporting collective knowledge production. But when the purpose is collective knowledge production rather than individual sources of data, the approaches to research need to be different.

3 Privilege, knowledge and power

Participatory research from my perspective is a process that is biased in favour of the least powerful. It is not a neutral process of stakeholder consultations. There are many processes in organizational and community settings that are designed to try to bring all the parties together in some type of dialogue. What is more challenging is to bring all the parties together in a way which gives those with less historic, cultural or economic voice a more prominent place at the table. Trade unions, by virtue of their potential capacity to withhold labour, have found one way in which power differences are addressed within a collective bargaining context. We do not always have such effective ways of gaining place at the knowledge-creating table in other settings, but our challenge is to seek those out and work as allies with those who are showing us the way.

Patricia Maguire, in her insightful book on feminist participatory research (1987), has written comprehensively about how the uses of concepts like participatory research and community can mask relations of power. Because the concept of participatory research has so often been framed in an anti-imperial, anti-colonial or liberatory context, it may have led us to think that some of the questions of gender, race, sexual or ability privileges were being taken care of in the formulations which arose in the late 1970s and 1980s. We know that this is not the case. 'Community' is a concept which can hide powerful patriarchal practices, render invisible class difference and paint out race as a factor in the knowledge struggles. A contemporary practice of participatory research must draw deeply upon the practices of feminist activism (Miles, 1998), integrated anti-racism (Dei, 1998), the inclusion movement (Pearpoint et al., 1992), the Aboriginal Self-Determination movement (Brant Castallano, 1993:145-56) and others. If participatory research is about learning to listen or learning to hear each other in new ways, then we must begin to understand how the privileges which accrue to those more

powerful in our societies effect the way that we see or think or hear. I can say that as a white and now middle-aged man, I have spent the past 30 years of my life working on peeling away layers of privilege so that I can begin to understand how my gender, race and other privileges blind and deafen me to the daily practices of exclusion. The popular education handbook, *Educating for a Change* (Arnold et al., 1995), remains another excellent source of practical ways of working on issues of power and privilege which could easily be incorporated into a participatory research process.

Towards Theorizing a Practice of Participatory Research

1 Social movements and civil society as a location for theorizing

One of the most important and fascinating lessons from the past that we can use for the future is that participatory research was very largely theorized and disseminated from a social movement or civil society base. Among the original premises were the importance of breaking what we referred to as the monopoly over knowledge production by universities. This was not in the least a form of anti-intellectualism, but was a recognition that the academic mode of production was, and remains, in some fundamental ways linked to different sets of interests and power relations from those of women and men in various social movement settings or located in more autonomous community-based, non-governmental structures. Much of the energy and impulse for deepening the understanding of participatory research came from the social movement contexts in Latin America, Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and elsewhere. The 'people power' movement of the Philippines made wide and informed use of the concepts and practices; the movements of the rural poor in India the same; Aboriginal peoples in Canada found these ideas important; the labour movement made reference to this way of working as part of the health and safety in the workplace activities; the democracy movements of Chile, Argentina, Colombia, Brazil and more made use of and further developed participatory research as part of the social movement ways of working.

The participatory research network made it possible for the creativity and knowledge-making, or history-making, capacity of all women and men to be seen, at least partially for many of us, in a profound way for the first time.

2 The role of the university

What is the role of the academy in participatory research? What has the academy done with partici-

patory research? What is the status of the knowledge generated in a participatory research process? I have been very troubled by these questions over the years and cannot pretend to have a clear sense of the appropriate role for institutionalized university involvement in our work. Participatory research originated as a challenge to positivist research paradigms as carried out largely by university-based researchers. Our position has been that the centre of the process needed to be in the margins, in the communities, with women, with people of colour and so forth. Our experience has been that it is very difficult to achieve this kind of process from a university base, hence the need for alternative structures such as networks and centres. But how do we reconcile this with the fact that most of the authors in this book have strong university affiliations, including myself?

I believe that many of us operate in situations of contradiction and self-conflict. Doubt may be one of our most identifiable common denominators. Doubt and humility may be the strongest contribution that our work collectively has to offer. If the research process is genuinely and organically situated in a community, workplace or group which is experiencing domination, then we need not, I believe, be afraid that the knowledge which is being generated will be used for purposes that the community or group does not need or wish for. The difficulty arises because there are different uses of knowledge in the academy from those in community or workplace situations. According to the discourse of participatory research, knowledge generated, whether of localized application or larger theoretical value, is linked in some ways with shifts of power or structural changes. As we know, intentions do not always produce desired results, but those of us who have been working along these lines for a number of years share these assumptions. At a minimum we hope for a fuller understanding of the context and conditions within which we work or live.

Knowledge within the academy serves a variety of purposes. It is a commodity by which academics do far more than exchange ideas; it is the very means of exchange for the academic political economy. Tenure, promotion, peer recognition, research grants and countless smaller codes of privilege are accorded through the adding up of articles, books, papers in 'refereed' journals and conferences. Academics in the marketplace of knowledge know that they must identify or become identified with streams of ideas which offer the possibility of publishing and dialogue within appropriate and recognized settings. Collaborative research or at least collaborative publishing is informally discouraged because of the difficulty in attributing authorship. Collaborative research with persons who are not academics by the standards of the academy is not common. And while academics in fact gain financially through accumulated publications of appropriate knowledge, community

collaborators seldom benefit from such collaboration in financial terms. As can be seen, academics are under economic, job survival or advancement pressures to produce in appropriate ways. And it is this structural pressure which plays havoc with academic engagement in the participatory research process. Is it not possible that in spite of one's personal history, in spite of ideological commitment, in spite of deep personal links with social movements or transformative processes that the structural location of the academy as the preferred location for the organizing of knowledge will distort a participatory research process?

Does this mean that there is no role for university-based folks to be engaged in participatory research processes? I do not believe that. Patti Lather (1986) made a comprehensive examination of the wide variety of post-positivist strategies with which university-based academics have been grappling. I do, however, deeply believe that university or similarly-accredited researchers are not necessary to a participatory research process. Participatory research ought to be a tool which social movements, activists, trade unionists, women on welfare, the homeless or any similar groups use as part of a variety of strategies and methods for the conduct of their work. If they wish to invite a university-based group to become involved, they need to set up the conditions at the start and maintain control of the process if they wish to benefit as much as possible. My guess is that countless groups make use of processes which resemble participatory research everyday without naming it or certainly without asking for outside validation of the knowledge which is produced.

Participatory research deserves to be taught in universities, and is increasingly being taught. The academic community deserves to discuss and challenge and be challenged by these and other ideas which raise questions of the role of knowledge and power. Adult educators, community workers, social workers, primary healthcare personnel, solidarity co-operators, co-operative movement workers, multicultural workers, teachers and countless others who begin working after a university education deserve to study, read and experience the ideas which make up participatory research.

Academics also do not cease to become members of the community by going to work in a university. There are countless community issues, whether related to toxic dumping, homelessness, high drop-out levels in local schools or unfair taxation policies, which engage us all as citizens. Academics have some skills which can contribute to community action along with the skills of others in the community. Academics do not have to be 'in charge' just because someone refers to a grassroots knowledge-generating process as participatory research.

Academics, like others in society can also find ways to support alternative groups, structures and networks. In the late 1970s in Toronto, the

Participatory Research Group had free office space thanks to the support of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. All of the authors in this book who have university links also have deep and long-standing links with a variety of community groups or transformative actions. Graduate students in many universities in Canada and the USA have worked as staff in a variety of community-based organizations because of initial interests from reading or hearing about participatory research. Universities, precisely because they are accorded the monopoly of the knowledge business, do have a power to confer some measures of legitimacy. As a friend of mine from Nicaragua once said during the early days of the Sandinista revolution, 'You have a certain kind of legitimacy and we have a certain kind of legitimacy. We can work together.' As in any other social or political work, knowing our limits and our possibilities and working from the basis of honesty and integrity are the common-sense best ways to proceed.

3 Can we co-construct knowledge with the 'rest of nature'?

We have begun to realize, perhaps too late, that our species has supported a way of living that makes many of us sad, poor, alone, frightened or marginalized. But that speaks of the political, of the economic. We are also informed in a variety of eloquent and dramatic ways that our species has also damaged the biosphere to such a degree that the survival of our own species can now be questioned. We live in a world where the dominant powers support a consumerist vision of a global market utopia. We live in a world that my colleague in Toronto, Edmund O'Sullivan, calls 'a killing machine' (O'Sullivan, 1999: 1). The world is not OK!

Environmentalists, including environmental educators, believe that one of the factors which has allowed us to put our very survival at risk is that we have become alienated from the rest of nature, from the other forms of life with which we share the world. There are different theories about the nature of this alienation but it has something to do with our patterns of domestication and with the ways in which the enlightenment and scientific discourses arose more than 500 years ago in white, male Europe. The notion that the world is knowable in predictable ways and that we are able to separate mind from body, thinking from emotions, has, arguably, made it easier for us to distance ourselves from the ancient knowledges of the world's first peoples and from ancient systems of women's knowledge. The work of Darlene Clover (1999), currently the most active writer on the subject of environmental adult education within the adult education movement, outlines the history of this theme within the adult education and community action field, documents the strong role that women have played within this movement and articulates a

framework for adult education which might well be taken up by participatory researchers.

Participatory research is a proposal for action that focuses on transformed understandings of the creation of knowledge among human beings. Our discourse looks at context, issues of social identity, webs of power and such, seeking new forms of knowledge construction from places outside the walls of power and dominance. We think that at times we have found new ways to co-create knowledge. But can we imagine a process of co-creating knowledge which might happen between ourselves and other forms of life, other species, trees, grasses, rocks? How is the rest of nature a participatory researcher? How is it that nature is both a site of new knowledge creation and a full or privileged participant in the creation of new forms of knowledge that will draw our rogue species closer to our more silent partners with which we share this planet?

A Permanent Critical Dimension

We did not find anything magical when we formulated what we call participatory research. We have touched upon and been touched often by the sheer power of human creativity and knowledge-creating power through our work, but our work has also inadvertently reinforced already existing patterns of social inequality. While the university world explodes with new discourses on power in all its forms, the faces in the universities in my part of the world, the resumé of scholars we hire, the forms of sharing knowledge we use, and the structures of learning and knowledge production have changed but little.

Still we know that without the struggles in which we have engaged and in which we continue to engage, things might well have been much worse. We are perhaps entering to a truly fantastic period when all we know about knowledge will be changed. I personally feel an excitement because in spite of the multinational dreams of orderly and systematic mass consumption on a global scale, we are also seeing forms of resistance and levels of resistance that we have never seen before. It is our opportunity and our responsibility to continue to peel back the layers of confusion and certainty, not for the next few years but for the rest of our lives.

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