CHAPTER 7

The Potential of (Participatory) Action Research for School Leaders, Local Policy Makers, and University-Based Researchers

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I walked tentatively into the modular classroom in rural Idaho, USA that October morning. Opening the door, the din of 52 high school students chatting and laughing and complaining all at once, in at least two languages, flooded me. I instinctively closed my eyes to adjust to the lack of natural light. When I opened them again, I saw only a few students sitting down. The others were standing, leaning into groups with friends and smiling.

After the bell rang, the teacher, Mrs. James (pseudonyms have been used throughout the chapter), cleared her throat to get their attention. They quieted. She introduced me as her niece, a doctoral student, who focused on participatory action research. The students seemed to look at me all at once, intrigued, but at the same time, bored. Nervous, I introduced myself.

"My name is Meagan. My aunt, your teacher, Mrs. James, invited me to come meet you today and work with you this week – if you want. Like she said, I do what's called Participatory Action Research, or PAR. In PAR,

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researchers like me work with everyday people like you, to solve problems or make changes. You become researchers, just like me." I babbled for a bit, I think, unsure when to stop. Looking around at the students and at my aunt for some indication that I should let the students speak. After probably too long, I paused.

Jaime, who, I found out later, was the class president, spoke up: "So, Miss Meagan, what do you want us to *do*?"

I hesitated, trying to choose my words carefully. I was fully aware of my privilege—a young, naïve, White doctoral student in the middle of a classroom of 52 Latino/a students, many of whom are considered "undocumented" by the United States immigration system because their parents brought them to the United States when they were young from countries like El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico without necessary papers.

"Well," I started, "I guess it's not what *I* want *you* to do. It's more what *you* want to do. Maybe we could start by doing a group discussion or brainstorming session." They seemed to be paying attention a bit more closely now. "What if I asked you what makes you mad? What do you not like or think is unfair about your lives, your community, this world? What pisses you off?" They seemed to perk up a bit when I used language they do not hear teachers use. "What if you could ask any question and get an answer? What if you could talk to anybody—even Obama—and they would listen? What would you say?"

As we started discussions that day, the students became lively. They wanted to tell me and Mrs. James what was unfair, what was wrong, and what questions they had. And they had ideas about how to fix things. Ideas ranged from how to recycle more at school, to how to improve the immigration system, to how to provide more equitable access to resources and opportunities in the United States. After two days of brainstorming and discussions, the students settled on a question they all wanted to work on together: *Why are our teachers racist?*[1]

An Introduction to (Participatory) Action Research

I entered the classroom that autumn day sure only of one thing: that I was interested in how participatory action research (PAR) could work in a school or classroom. I had taken a class on PAR and had strong ethical leanings toward a methodological approach to research that would include and prioritize voices of students historically disenfranchised by the research

[1] All details of this project can be found at www.researchforempowerment.com/burned/

process itself, but other than that I was not sure of much. I did not know what the students would want to research, or if they would be interested at all. I did not know how they would react to me entering their classroom, their space, and their group.

I learned a lot that first day and then during the 18 months I worked with Mrs. James and her students. While the number of students fluctuated with class enrollment, a core group of about 30 students worked together with Mrs. James and me to start a critical conversation about race and racism in the school and community with those in positions of power. We used PAR to guide this conversation.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide school leaders, local policymakers (e.g. school board members, superintendents, and elected leaders), and novice researchers with a broad introduction to Action Research (AR) and PAR. This chapter positions AR/PAR as one methodological approach that school leaders and local policy actors can use to understand local challenges and induce changes in response to these challenges. Throughout the chapter, we discuss the origins and theoretical underpinnings of AR and PAR, present one commonly used AR/PAR process, and provide recommendations about how novice scholars can engage in AR/PAR. Throughout the chapter, we draw on examples from scholarly literature and the first author's research in rural Idaho, which took place as part of a research project entitled *Why are our teachers racist?* Throughout the chapter, references to I or we are made in reference to the first author.

Origins and Theoretical Underpinnings of AR and PAR

Scholars have offered multiple accounts of the historical origin of AR and PAR (Santos 2015). Many scholars credit Kurt Lewin with the development of AR through his attempts to instigate change in social behaviors in the 1940s (Kemmis and McTaggart 2005; Levin 1999; Lind 2008; Winter 1998). Lewin is widely viewed as the founder of AR because he challenged the dominant positivist paradigm tied to the scientific method (Levin 1999) by adopting an inquiry process involving reconnaissance, planning, and action (Winter 1998). His experiments and those of other early action researchers, such as Ronald Lippitt and Marian Radke, sought to produce practical solutions to real-world issues in the United States (Lind 2008), including racism, oppression, and intergroup conflict (Glassman et al. 2013).

Several strands developed out of Lewin's efforts as well as early work in Britain (Elliott and Adelman 1973) and Australia (Carr and Kemmis 1986) that sought after more "practical," "critical," and explicitly "emancipatory" research (Kemmis and McTaggart 2005). All of these efforts resulted in a diverse and overlapping web of frameworks and methodologies applied in fields across the social sciences, education, and health sciences (Stark 2014; Santos 2015).

In the 1970s, the participatory strand grew out of a commitment to holistic epistemology, knitting together reason and personal ethics, or "head and heart" (Fals-Borda 2001, p. 29). Early PAR adopters were in part inspired by Paulo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* which exhorted readers to listen to the voices of the oppressed and seek their liberation from unjust, systemic marginalization by enabling them to take control of their circumstances (Levin 1999; Lind 2008). Freire's critical theory privileged "ordinary people's knowledge" (Lind 2008, p. 223), melding naturally with the participatory, democratic approach of AR. This resulted in a type of AR focused on the empowerment of marginalized individuals to inform and lead change-focused inquiry, thereby dismantling the traditional research hierarchy (Fals-Borda and Rahman 1991; Santos 2015).

From a brief glance at the literature, it may seem that rather than a cohesive methodology, AR/PAR became a broad, collaborative movement of "social activists, organizational/community leaders, and scholars" (Glassman et al. 2013, p. 274). However, Kemmis and McTaggart (2005), Santos (2015), and others have made clear that AR and PAR are distinguished from other approaches to research in unique and important ways. While Santos (2015) focuses on PAR's strong connection to the political realm as its defining and distinguishing feature, Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) offer three distinct features differentiating AR and PAR from more conventional research:

- Shared ownership of research projects,
- Community-based analysis of social problems, and
- An orientation toward community action. (p. 273)

Understanding each of these unique attributes and how they can be authentically achieved is important for those interested in pursuing AR/PAR because otherwise one runs the risk of what Fals-Borda and Rahman (1991) call inauthentic engagement or "cooptation" of AR/PAR

(pp. 28–30). Rather than treating AR/PAR as an "easy blueprint" or "panacea" approach for school leaders, local policy makers, or others, the methodology should be taken up along with its epistemological roots in authentic participation, inclusive knowledge production, and local-level action. These three critical aspects frame our discussion of AR/PAR in the remainder of the chapter, including the further description of my research in rural Idaho to more clearly illustrate how these features can look in a real-world AR/PAR project.

Shared Ownership

One of the central tenets of AR/PAR epistemology is the idea that expertise lies in everyday lived experience and should not be conceptualized as outside of the reach of "ordinary" people (Fals-Borda and Rahman 1991; Freire 1970, 1974; Kemmis and McTaggart 2005; Santos 2015; Sohng 1996). Going further, AR/PAR is rooted firmly in an epistemological stance that not only includes but also prioritizes the experiential knowledge(s) of those often seen as non-experts. Sohng (1996) explains why flipping the knowledge hierarchy on its head is so crucial for AR/PAR:

> The production of knowledge has become a specialized profession and only those trained in that profession can legitimately produce it…In modern society, knowledge has been increasingly concentrated in the hands of "experts" and the elite class they represent. The ideology of the knowledge society has…historically privileged the pronouncements of trained experts over the discourses of "ordinary" people (Foucault 1980). Today this ideology manifests itself in deference to experts, and ultimately the subordination of people's own experiences and personal meanings to expertise. As a result, decisions affecting ordinary people are based on "expert" knowledge, denying the rationality of individual citizens and their life experiences. Understanding human nature and the problems of living becomes the purview of scientists, rendering people dependent on experts to explain and oversee their life experiences (Berman 1981). Hence, the specialists dominate any debate concerning issues of public interest because ordinary people are unable to enter the scientized debate, as they lack the technical terminology and specialized language of argumentation. (Habermas 1979, pp. 79–80)

Because it has become expected or unquestioned that "specialists" and "experts" maintain firm control over public debate around issues like education, health care, or criminal justice, "ordinary" people are stuck in a

dependent position, rather than in one that puts them in control of their own lives and decisions that will affect them.

Both AR and PAR seek to address problems of power, hierarchy, and dependence in the production of knowledge by engaging members of local communities as "the primary agents of change" (Glassman et al. 2013), whatever that change may be. The relationship between the researcher and the researched, as well as the situation being investigated, becomes *interdependent* (Levin 1999; Sohng 1996). AR/PAR redistributes power through equal participation in the investigation, and repositions a university-based researcher—sometimes referred to as "outside" or "external"—as a facilitator (Lind 2008) or co-researcher, equal in power with all other co-researchers—sometimes referred to as "inside" or "internal"—in a research collective (Call-Cummings 2017; Fine et al. 2004; Freire 1982; Gaventa 1991).

This shared ownership ideally extends to all parts of the AR/PAR research process. Bourke (2009) says participatory research is "a research process which involved those being researched in the decision-making and conduct of the research, including project planning, research design, data collection and analysis, and/or the distribution and application of research findings" (p. 458). Fine and Torre (2006) aver that no matter how we define participatory research, it must have an "understanding that people—especially those who have experienced historic oppression—hold deep knowledge about their lives and experiences, and should help shape the questions, [and] frame the interpretations' of research" (p. 458).

One of the many ways this shared ownership can be achieved is through co-authorship of scholarly publications or other co-dissemination of process and findings. An example of co-authorship can be seen in Fine et al. (2004), cited above, where Michelle Fine published a scholarly book chapter with several of her co-researchers from a project conducted around the impact of college education on inmates at a women's prison in New York. These co-researchers were, in fact, inmates at the prison and conducted the investigation alongside Dr. Fine. The decision to include them as co-authors of the publication meant that they literally co-owned those findings.

Another approach to co-dissemination of findings involves collectively deciding what findings are most important, who needs to hear or see or experience the findings, and how that will happen. In my study in rural Idaho, I asked students who participated in the research project to think how and with whom would they share our findings if money, time, and

energy were not an issue. Some students suggested creating a documentary film and sending it to President Obama. Other students suggested writing a book describing their experiences with racism in schools. Finally, other students recommended holding a mandatory school assembly at which the research team could present the most important aspects of our work together. Through a process of group brainstorming, we decided to start a conversation at the school and with the local community about how racism affected the everyday lives of these students.

A few of the students found out when the local school board would next meet. The group selected four students to act as representatives at the meeting, and Mrs. James got us on the agenda. We attended the meeting, and there the four selected students shared their stories of how they experienced racism at their school and in the community. There was no "ask." They simply wanted to be heard and have their experiences acknowledged.

Community-Based Analysis

Analysis of data conjures up images of a lone researcher in a white lab coat, surrounded by beeping computers, smoking beakers, and chalkboards full of confusing algorithms. Like research design and data collection, this stage is often seen as the purview of the "experts." Dodson and Schmalzbauer (2005) remark that "the interpretive stage of research is conventionally one in which the data become the sole province of the researcher community for analysis and construction of meaning" (p. 954). Curry (2012) referred to this practice of extracting data from participants and then hoarding and interpreting it as "hit and run" research and cites Reinharz (1979) calling it "the rape model of research" (p. 95). Whatever metaphor is used, this practice reproduces, extends, and further entrenches unequal power relationships between the researcher and the researched. Meaningful participation of community members in the analysis process, on the other hand, can enhance insight into participants' ways of knowing, which gives AR/PAR the potential to produce more "authentic" knowledge.

Community-based analysis is an essential yet often overlooked or at best thinly discussed aspect of AR/PAR. While participatory analysis is not overly emphasized in methodological literature, the few who do discuss it provide helpful examples of how it can be carried out effectively. Curry (2012) provides a useful example of collaborative analysis with teachers and school reformers, describing "an onion-skin order whereby researchers

shared their emerging analytic claims first and then study participants shared their interpretations last so that they could contest or affirm the research team's understandings" (p. 94). This process allowed all involved in the analysis to articulate their own views while simultaneously remaining open to learning through dialogue. Curry explains a second approach as a pulling away of a curtain or a fishbowl approach, through which participants watched researchers conducting analysis. University-based researchers strategically distributed opportunities for community-based researchers to speak back, critique, and question that analysis. Both approaches highlighted AR/PAR's commitment to level power dynamics between "outside" and "inside" researchers.

Dodson and Schmalzbauer (2005) refer to the process of participatory analysis as collaborative interpretation and co-production of knowledge. From their work with poor mothers, they provide a useful example of how participants can be meaningfully included throughout data analysis. In this study, participants were invited to be co-analysts of the data, working together with the "outside" researchers to see inside the data, to make explicit what was implicit. They did this by asking a few simple questions:

1. Are we hearing what is really going on in these people's lives? Does this sound like what is going on in the lives of people you know?
2. What else do you think is going on that is not represented here?
3. We do not understand the meaning of what is being said here. Can you explain to us what this means? (List points where clarity is missing.)
4. If you were trying to find out what we are trying to find out about… what would *you* expect people not to share or talk about? Why would they be hesitant to talk about this? What's at stake?
5. After going over all of the information that we have gathered from our interviews, we have concluded the following…Do you think we have this right? Are we getting it? (pp. 955–956)

Dodson and Schmalzbauer note that they always improvised this process and asked questions that seemed appropriate given the particular context. They find that "when participants believed the interaction was open to their knowledge and their critique of our limitations, the most unexpected and revealing commentaries emerged" (p. 956). Grounded in the epistemological commitment that ordinary people are the experts of their own lives, this type of collaborative data analysis can uncover participants' deep knowledge and insight.

In my research in rural Idaho, I worked to achieve equal power relationships among members of the collective. But no matter how hard I tried, I remained the outsider. At one point I decided to capitalize on that position and, with the permission of the students with whom I worked, conducted one-on-one interviews with a few of their White teachers. The students felt uncomfortable having conversations with some of their teachers about race and racism, so, in my position as outsider, I was able to do that with low personal risk. After I conducted the interviews, I anonymized the data and brought it back to the students for interpretation. Similar to the Dodson and Schmalzbauer (2005) approach, our collective read through the data together and I asked them questions like, "What do you think she meant by that?" "I don't understand what he's saying there. Can you help me understand?" "This is what I thought about that. Is that right or am I missing another possible interpretation?" By positioning myself as learner rather than expert, I placed value on the students' interpretations based in their lived experiences. They became experts and their analysis became a useful tool. In this way, we redistributed power over and within the research process.

Orientation Toward Action

AR/PAR engages groups of researchers without deference to title or position with the aim of some practical action or change, such as developing a social justice-oriented high school curriculum (Cammarota and Romero 2011); understanding barriers to housing for women fleeing domestic violence (Ponic et al. 2010); challenging bullying in K-12 schools (Stoudt 2007); or influencing women's health policy (Wang 1999). In fact, Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) argue that the research-action dualism typically presented in other forms of more traditional research, where research is conducted according to some predetermined process by those in authority to do so and then is followed by information-giving and action-taking based on that information, does not exist in AR/PAR. Instead, they suggest that "research and action converge *in* communicative action aimed at practical and critical decisions about what to do in the extended form of exploratory action" (p. 319). Kemmis and McTaggart, referencing Habermas's theory of the system and lifeworld, echo the sentiment that "research and action are to be understood not as separate functions but rather as different moments in a unified process of struggle" (p. 320).

This breaking down of the research-action dualism was clear in my work in rural Idaho. From the moment I stepped in to the students' classroom, our focus was on what we needed to *do*. The process of gathering data and analyzing it became steps toward taking action. Indeed, it centered on taking action and calling for change. For example, soon after we decided to try and better understand the students' relationships with their White teachers, the students expressed their interest in interviewing their teachers themselves about how they see their Latino/a students. This, we envisioned, would be a type of data collection and would put our collective in a position to conduct analysis that would form the basis for a call to action of some sort. Individual students volunteered to invite teachers to be interviewed. Eight teachers were invited and four agreed to participate.

I worked with the student co-researchers to develop a flexible interview protocol. We brainstormed about what types of questions they should ask the teachers. Initially, students wanted to ask questions like, "Why are you racist?" or "Why do teachers at this school favor White kids?" or "Why is it always the brown kids who get in trouble?" We had conversations about how questions like that might make defense mechanisms flare up in teachers so that students really would not get useful or "authentic" data. We role-played with students becoming teachers that would be interviewed and thought about how various questions would garner different types of responses. We settled on questions that seemed to get at racism in more circuitous ways:

1. Why did you start teaching?
2. Without giving names, can you talk about some students you are concerned about? Why are you concerned about them?
3. Let's say a student comes to class and tells you he hasn't done his homework that day. What would a good teacher do? What would a weak teacher do?
4. Let's say a student falls asleep in class almost every day. What is the right thing to do? (After the teacher has answered, ask the follow up question: How have you come to know that this is the right thing to do?)
5. What does it take to be a really good teacher of Latino students? (After the teacher has answered, ask the follow up question: How have you come to know these things?)
6. What does it take to be a really good teacher of at-risk students? (After the teacher has answered, ask the follow up question: How have you come to know these things?)

7. Can you tell us about a situation you have had with a student you were concerned about? How did you deal with that student or that situation?
8. Can you tell us about the best student you've ever had? Tell us all about this student.
9. What teaching methods do you use for those that have a hard time understanding the subject you teach?

Looking back, I see that in addition to asking questions to gather data, we asked questions that facilitated the teachers' authentic reflection on their own experiences. Giving White teachers the opportunity to reflect on and then discuss their experiences with Latino/a students, make explicit their own biases, and no longer take for granted preconceived ideas about teaching and learning relationships was action in the form of information gathering.

The AR/PAR Process

Traditionally, research is conceptualized as "detached discovery and empirical verification of generalizable patterns" (Sohng 1996, p. 78) that is based on a systematic, linear process of well-defined steps, which include: (a) identifying a research problem and questions, (b) designing the study, and (c) collecting and analyzing data. However, like much inquiry with roots in critical theory, AR/PAR demands a more flexible and responsive procedure. Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) suggest that instead of some linear, mechanistic procedure to which a researcher is bound in order to claim validity or rigor, AR/PAR is much more like a "spiral of self-reflective cycles" (p. 276) that includes aspects of planning, acting/observing, and reflecting over and over again. Knapp (2016) dubs the process "design-in-practice" (p. 31), which evolves as the researcher, or, in the case of AR/PAR, a research collective made up of multiple stakeholders, adjusts and refines due to unforeseen events, revealed complexities, or unexplored opportunities. It is important to emphasize that AR/PAR must be an iterative process and that with each iteration new understandings are generated that further inform the work as it moves forward. Indeed, this flexibility and iterative responsiveness are at the very heart of the methodological approach and its validity.

It is crucial that practitioners, such as school leaders, local policymakers, and novice researchers, understand that AR/PAR is not intended to be a simple or straightforward process to follow and will not look the same

every time one engages in it. Rather, a keen focus on the epistemological underpinnings of the process at each step of the action research process is critical for authentic engagement. Figuring out creative ways to bring together a collective that is both inclusive and representative; making learning explicit and folding new understandings back into the process; and taking action that is rooted in and speaks to the needs and expressed desires of a community should be paramount.

Applications to the Study of Leadership and Policy

One of the most foreboding questions is: why should school leaders or local policy makers engage in AR/PAR? What kinds of unique knowledge and understandings can school leaders and local policy makers gain from using AR/PAR in their schools and communities? And how can they work effectively with university-based researchers throughout the process? The illustrative study we have described throughout this chapter provides a useful example of how AR/PAR can be enacted to help school leaders and local policymakers access authentic knowledge of the individuals and groups they serve. The case also helps novice researchers understand the flexible, iterative process of AR/PAR as well as the potential it holds for conducting community-based research.

School leaders are bombarded with many different types of data, including enrollment information, achievement data, graduation rates, student demographics, poverty measures, and much more. This data can be very helpful in answering many questions, particularly those related to improving student achievement outcomes. But what if a school leader wants to improve the community in her school? What if the students want to eliminate large amounts of food waste? What if classroom teachers want to adopt grading practices that reflect the true learning of the child? What if students say racism, bullying, or safety is an issue and strive to develop a response? AR/PAR holds promise in these and many similar situations.

Establishing Shared Ownership in Leadership and Policy Research

When confronted with an issue like one of those mentioned above, school leaders and policymakers should first think about who should be at the proverbial table. Who has a stake in the problem and potential solution? To take the example of school cafeteria food waste, students should of

course be at the table, but who else? A school leader might partner with a representative from the local school board in charge of making decisions about nutrition. They could invite a representative of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) to attend an initial meeting at which those stakeholders implicated in such an issue could start a process of investigation. They should probably also ask some of the lunch staff (school-based and central staff) to attend such a meeting. Teachers may want to play a role as well. They may also choose to invite a university-based researcher who focuses on nutrition and/or education to join the research collective as a methodological facilitator. The leader and policymaker should make these invitations to participate in an AR/PAR project purposefully to assure all who have a stake in the outcome are represented.

Once everyone implicated in the issue is part of a research collective, they can make collaborative decisions about what they want to achieve and how they want to achieve it. Perhaps they decide they need to collect data about what students prefer to eat. They may decide it is important to examine other school district nutrition models. Or they may hold a town hall meeting to garner a lot of feedback in a short amount of time. Whatever they decide, the participatory nature of the process is most important and is what will lead to change that speaks to the needs of those implicated.

Engaging in Community-Based Analysis in Leadership and Policy Research

While the entire AR/PAR process should be based on stakeholders' experiences and needs, analysis can be a time in which communities feel a sense of buy-in because they are involved in a part of the research process typically reserved for "experts". Using a consecutive, "onion skin" analysis procedure (Curry 2012), school officials could examine the data, draw out initial themes and findings, and then share them with the collective's student, parent, teacher, lunchroom staff, and other members for confirmation or correction. Alternatively, the collective could use the "curtain" or "fishbowl" approach described by Curry, inserting their insights as school leaders analyze the data, perhaps by responding to guiding questions. To apply Dodson and Schmalzbauer's (2005) approach, the entire collective could engage in collaborative analysis, working through raw data to identify themes and apply interpretations. In any of these procedures, all participants have the opportunity to weigh in on the data collected, share their own insights, and influence the next steps.

Adopting an Orientation Toward Action in Leadership and Policy Research

Once data is collected and analyzed, all stakeholders should be meaningfully involved in decisions about how to disseminate findings and what action(s) to take in relation to those findings. In this hypothetical project about school lunches, different parts of the collective may choose to take various forms of action. Perhaps a group of students decides to take action by advertising new school lunch options in exciting ways. A group of parents may disseminate key information to the PTA. Lunch staff may hold professional training meetings or create regular opportunities for students and parents to provide constructive feedback or suggestions. The school leader and school board member may work to make policy changes, depending on findings. Everyone can play a meaningful role and take action in important ways.

Recommendations for Novice Researchers: A Reorientation of Identity

In providing recommendations for novice researchers, we offer suggestions regarding the three points discussed throughout the chapter: shared ownership, community-based analysis, and orientation toward action.

Challenge 1: Negotiating New Roles in AR/PAR In our experience, one of the trickiest aspects of engaging in the shared ownership of AR/PAR is in the negotiation of roles (Call-Cummings 2017). As university-based researchers, we often take for granted ownership of the research process and products. We fill out Institutional Review Board (IRB) forms. We are listed as Principal Investigators (PIs). We author scholarly manuscripts alone or with other "scholarly" colleagues. We collect data and make decisions about how the data are interpreted and shared. In other words, we own research. Yet AR/PAR upends this seemingly rigid and supposedly necessary structure. As university-based researchers become part of a research collective, they/we must reorient their/our identities and relationships to research participants. For example, as a university-based researcher engaging with a particular community around a specific issue, I am most likely, by definition, an outsider because of my status as a university-based researcher. But AR/PAR requires that we work together with communities in such a way as to toggle between being an outsider

and an insider. This comes with ethical considerations as well as methodological quandaries that should be explicitly and collaboratively considered within the research collective.

This reorientation of our identity as researchers also relates to expertise. As university-based researchers, we are trained as experts and think of ourselves as experts. We are required to publish in scholarly journals that treat us and refer to us as experts. Students speak to us with deference. Media representatives ask us for our opinions as if the public should pay attention to us. AR/PAR breaks that hierarchy. It can be difficult for a novice—and a more senior—researcher to feel comfortable in the role of learner or co-producer of knowledge. It may feel to the researcher as if she is losing her authority.

Our first recommendation is for researchers who are interested in engaging in an AR/PAR approach to embrace the reorientation of identity and the fluidity of roles within the collective. Transparently negotiate roles with members of the research collective. Make this an explicit part of the process from beginning to end. Ask questions you may normally only journal about or discuss with a colleague, mentor, or advisor. By dealing with these issues up front you will be more likely to authentically share ownership of the process and products. Your work will gain validity because you will wrestle with power relations openly rather than allowing them to remain unquestioned and unchallenged, potentially undermining your findings (Call-Cummings 2017).

Challenge 2: Approaching Participants as Co-analysts Challenges also arise as we seek to engage in community-based analysis. This analytic approach requires a further reorientation of our identity. As university-based researchers, we are most likely experts in a particular approach to data analysis. As we engage in community-based analysis, however, our role becomes that of equal participant and, if necessary, facilitator of conversations and discussions that make meaning explicit. The protocol provided by Dodson and Schmalzbauer (2005) provides a helpful guide to begin this process.

The keys for successful community-based analysis are sincere humility and authentic engagement in learning about the lived experiences of those community researchers, as well as about the meanings they place on those experiences. As we reorient our identity to engage as humble learners and

facilitators, analysis will become a unique opportunity for consciousness raising for all those involved in the knowledge production process—including university-based researchers. Analysis carries with it the potential for access to understandings and knowledges otherwise inaccessible to "outsiders."

Challenge 3: Recognizing Action The final challenge involves shifting our orientation as researchers toward action and recognizing what actions are appropriate given the capacity and context where the AR/PAR research occurs. This is central to AR/PAR and yet, in my own research in Idaho (Call-Cummings 2015), I have found it to be a stumbling block. I assumed that the "action" entailed in AR/PAR was supposed to be a particular type of action—a visible or tangible change; an inequitable policy struck down or an unfair practice stopped. At the conclusion of my 18-month study in Idaho, I was disappointed that no one appeared to be clamoring for change, the school had not established a formal process to address racism among teachers, and no school-wide anti-racism campaign had been initiated. I felt like the project had failed, or I had done something completely wrong during the process. However, upon reflection, I learned that in many instances it is the *process* of AR/PAR that is important and that can lead to a critical empowering of those involved. Rather than some monumental change in other students, practices, or policies, the change came to those who participated in the project—those members of the collective as well as those teachers who were interviewed and those who engaged with the student co-researchers in the dissemination of findings (school board members and other community leaders). Several of the students who had collaborated with Mrs. James and I reported after their project concluded that they felt inspired and were in a better position to stand up for themselves and their peers when they were in situations where they felt discriminated against. They felt more confident speaking with their White teachers and administrators and believed they had developed the skills to effectively articulate their feelings about racism at their school and in their community. Meanwhile, teachers became more aware of their own biases and presuppositions about Latino/a/x students and families. School board members may have felt freer to discuss racism as an important issue at this school and in this community rather than ignoring it or pretending it was not an issue. So, even though racism had not disappeared, the change came through and in the research process itself.

The recommendation for novice researchers is thus to think about action, change, and transformation more broadly than one might normally, and to take cues from the other members of the collective in terms of the actions they want and need to take and the change(s) they are seeking. Being transparent and explicit about one's own research agenda at the beginning of the process as one builds relationships with members of the collective will help in doing this.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented an introduction to three critical aspects of action research and participatory action research for school leaders, local policy makers, and novice researchers: shared ownership, community-based analysis, and an orientation toward action. While AR/PAR includes much more than these three ingredients, and is more flexible and iterative than simply adding these three together and expecting a clean process to emerge, we believe that a strong and reflective emphasis on all three can help school leaders, local policymakers, and novice researchers as they engage in AR/PAR projects. Drawing on my research experience and on scholarly literature, we have included several examples of ways in which various stakeholders can reach toward these three aspects of AR/PAR, especially, but not exclusively, in relation to projects that focus on issues of social justice. Overall, this chapter illustrates that AR/PAR is a unique and accessible methodological approach and that school leaders, local policymakers, and novice researchers should feel confident in engaging in it with communities that seek change.

Recommended Readings

Fals Borda, O. & Rahman, M. A. (1991). *Action and knowledge: breaking the monopoly with participatory action-research*. New York: Apex.

Fals Borda and Rahman highlight applications of PAR to social change projects in the developing world, in which participants gain power over their circumstances through generating knowledge and devising local solutions to local problems.

Reason, P., & Bradbury, Hilary. (2006). *Handbook of action research: The concise paperback edition*. London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE.

Reason and Bradbury provide an excellent introduction to the philosophical and theoretical groundings and development of AR/PAR methodology and the potential of collaborative knowledge production. Contributors, who

include Fals Borda, describe AR/PAR projects carried out in numerous national and professional contexts, all sharing a commitment to democratic, reflective research.

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