

A Critical Exploration of Partnership in Participatory Action Research: Insights for Educational Contexts

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Abstract:

Participatory action research (PAR) is becoming more prevalent in schools and other educational contexts. Thus, the nature, process and experience of youth-adult research partnerships are increasingly important to ensure its efficacy. What are youth-adult teams' experiences of partnership? And, how does the PAR literature assist teams in situating and understanding their partnership work? This paper explores both questions. Specifically, I begin by identifying and analyzing five ways the theme of youth-adult partnership is given view in the PAR literature. They include, 1) taking partnership for granted; 2) viewing partnership via PAR principles; 3) understanding partnership via tasks and contributions; 4) relaying partnership via models/conceptual frameworks of the PAR process; and 5) gleaning meanings of partnership from team successes and challenges. Next, I examine each theme with respect to the contributions and pitfalls they confer to youth-adult PAR teams striving to understand their experience of partnership. This discussion is informed by my own membership, as a university educational researcher, on a youth-adult PAR team. As a research team, we examined students' vision of educational justice over a period of four years. We also engaged in collaborative self-study to understand and articulate, as a research team, our own experiences of youth-adult partnership. This paper contributes to the efficacy of youth-adult partnerships in educational contexts through its critical analysis of partnership in the PAR literature and by illustrating the insights gained through the study of one PAR team experience.

Keywords: participatory action research, youth-adult partnership, research team, educational research and settings