



Participatory Action Research and Information Literacy: Revising an Old New Hope for Research and Practice

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Research with the interested community:

Participatory Action Research (PAR) + Information literacy (IL) = ?

- Tracing and constructing the research agenda integrating PAR into IL research and practice. In order to achieve this:
- Advanced some pros and cons of using such methodological tradition on IL;
- Seek an understanding of the possible contributions that this PAR-IL research agenda can bring to the IL field.
- We have developed a questionnaire to gather some insights from the research community in this matter

... and let's take into account the three possible methodological stances: quantitative, qualitative, and a mixed methods perspective. Thus, not dividing but joining forces!



Action Research

- It originated around the in the 1930s and 1940s, with Kurt Lewin [5][6]
- Lewin presented some useful notions, such as: knowledge generation from problem solving, group dynamics, and the improvement of people's conditions.
- Recurrent themes for action researchers are related with issues of power and/or discrimination against minority groups.

"action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities" [15].



Participatory Action Research...

...and other participatory methodologies

- There are many traditions derived from action research: action research [8], action science [9], feminist PAR [10], PAR [11], practitioner research [12], self-study [13], teacher research [14], among others.
- We have preferred to use PAR, but keeping with the spirit and philosophy of these approaches, we include any other participatory methodologies even if we center on PAR.



PAR and IL: a Good Match? PAR side

- PAR draws attention to the reactive effects of the researcher's presence within a participatory community.
- It actively aims to facilitate change and study, analyze and improve individual or groups' practices to achieve a state of betterment.
- Researcher works with participants from their own knowledge, mediating common understandings building upon the knowledge, practices and realities of all involved.
- Researchers may reflect on their own practices and thus they could achieve a state of betterment as well.
- PAR goals have been emancipatory and aimed towards the improvement of the practices and situations of the people involved.



PAR and IL: a Good Match? IL side

- IL strives to develop more informed individuals, independent information users, and critical thinkers in order to achieve many different purposes, such as: problem solving, decision making, emancipation, active citizenship, and lifelong learning.
- The ‘good use’ of information for the improvement of the human being (a state of betterment) is at the heart of IL and a participatory stance seems like a perfect match for IL and its various purposes.
- Several researchers have used PAR, often driven by critical theory, for developing information literacy programs or activities in higher education [18], [19], [20], [21], within schools [22], for the community [23], and to evaluate IL instruction [24].
- In this age of social media, participatory approaches are logical choices when dealing with the integration or mediation of these technologies for their appropriation [25].



Pros and Cons of PAR

- PAR is defined as ‘research with people’ instead of ‘research on people’ [27].
- It deals with the rich subjectivity of human beings and it is what it does best.
- However, some positivists or conductists have sometimes dismissed PAR as a purely subjective and not a serious research tradition [28][29].
- Arguments against PAR tend mirror those against qualitative methodologies, e.g. stating that action researchers do not have mathematical and statistical skills.
- Issues of validity, trustworthiness and number of participants in a participatory study, cannot be evaluated with the same quantitative research values.
- It is favorable if it brings some objectivity into subjectivity. But it should seek the ultimate goal of finding ‘the truth’ [33], balancing the objective/subjective dichotomy!



Pros and Cons of PAR

- PAR is valid if it is systematic, has careful parameters, and follows its objectives
- Some solutions to address trustworthiness in PAR are that the researcher has to be even more transparent about the whole research process [6], [31], [32].
- Trustworthiness also means to conform to long-standing traditional values, such as replicability and its consonance with published literature.
- It has to maintain logic in its structure, its train of thought, and analysis throughout all its stages.
- We must demonstrate how a state of betterment was achieved considering participants' practices or situations. These are the main aims of PAR [34].
- Participatory methodologies demand, apart from transparency, the deepest ethical commitment from the researcher.



Methodology

Our guiding research question is:

In what ways can PAR contribute to the development of a research and practice IL agenda?

Secondary research questions are:

- a) In what ways have IL practitioners profited from using participatory methodologies?
- b) What are the main contributions of PAR in IL research and practice?, and
- c) To which degree have IL practitioners used and accepted PAR for their activities?

For this research we are using a qualitative and PAR approach, with which we invite all IL practitioners and academics to answer a questionnaire (wait two slides!) that we have developed as our main data collection method, we are considering interviews as well, if you would like to volunteer for this be sure to mention it on the questionnaire.



In Conclusion

- This is a starting point toward the revision of the use of PAR in IL research and practice, thus we have briefly developed some of the background to this research
- We invite interested stakeholders to provide feedback and answers to a questionnaire (next slide) to further develop these topics.
- All systematic research, which has been properly carried out is valid if it can advance our understanding and contribute to theory and practice. This includes PAR.
- It is our interest to explore, seek to understand, and establish the possible contributions that a PAR-IL research agenda can bring to the LIS profession.



Thank you for your attention!

Please tell us your insights by filling out our questionnaire



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We would greatly appreciate if you could take some time and answer our questionnaire in order to advance in this interesting exploration of the use of participatory methodologies in Information Literacy research and practice. If you wish to input any personal and/or identifiable data in this questionnaire, we will keep them safe and confidential.

Many thanks!

www.surveymonkey.com/s/BJLJ2VG

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PAR and
Information Literacy

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