Power-sharing Partnerships: Teachers' Experiences of Participatory Methodology

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What Is the Purpose of this Study?

- To investigate the experiences of teachers as co-researchers in a long-term partnership with university researchers who participated in an asset-based intervention project known as Supportive Teachers, Assets and Resilience (STAR).

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

- In the field of participatory research, power and power dynamics are highly acknowledged and actively addressed.

- It is the goal of participatory research to create symmetrical relationships between the researcher and participants where both voices are equal.

- Participatory research is based on the postulation that social change is likely to be achieved and sustained if the process engages the community on which it focuses.

- However, power relations and dynamics may create challenging situations in relationships between researchers and communities.

- Limited research has been done to study the process of collaborative research, specifically in terms of power relations as experienced by co-researchers, who are viewed as equal partners.

- The questions remain as to how co-researchers, such as teachers (fulfilling the role of partners in research), experience their role in a seemingly different hierarchy and how power relations might affect their experiences.

WHAT ARE THE FINDINGS?

- Teachers (co-researchers) described the nature of power in participatory partnerships in terms of certain descriptive characteristics, namely leadership, decision making, empowerment, achieving personal goals, owning power, and trust.

- They reported that the nature of power in participatory partnerships could also be understood against the background of certain stumbling blocks such as time constraints, lack of commitment, work overload, limited self-confidence, and lack of role clarity.

- Teachers reported that the nature of power in participatory partnerships was, inter alia, experienced through the shift in power over the course of their engagement in the project, during which they saw themselves gradually changing to become members of a community of practice, eventually trusting one another and gaining more confidence.

- Teachers related their own understanding and meaning making of power and partnership in terms of them forging equitable and mutually beneficial partnerships (with university researchers, peers, and the wider community), and establishing an enabling environment (both locally and nationally).

- Teachers indicated that they experienced power and partnership in terms of the capacity to act by empowering others, providing leadership, and taking action.

- Teachers regarded themselves as agents who could unlock potential to facilitate social change in their communities by

transferring knowledge, mobilizing resources, and creating community networks.

WHO SHOULD CARE MOST?

- Participatory action researchers.
- Individuals or organizations (such as nongovernmental organizations and faith-based organizations) conducting interventions in communities where relationships form the backbone to facilitate social change and improvement.
- Practitioners who work in resource-constrained communities, such as social workers, psychologists, and health practitioners.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Provide training for practitioners who work in resource-constrained communities on the establishment of trust and balancing of power relations in projects where social change in communities is envisioned.
- Provide training on the framework for power-sharing participatory partnership, enabling health practitioners to understand how equal power relations can be achieved in a manner that will benefit the partners.
- Involve all partners in decision making, allowing them to feel that they have the power to be equal members of a partnership, thus making them members of a community of practice.
- Make use of participatory methodology when undertaking community-based interventions to facilitate consensus building and social interaction among all partners.
- Provide constructive feedback to all partners on their practice.
- Be guided by communities on the ground level in identifying problems to address, because they will ultimately form a community of practice and fulfil a significant role as social change agents in assisting with solutions.