

## Participatory Research in Latin America: Three Case Studies

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### Abstract

*A new paradigm of research is emerging under the rubric of participatory research. Participatory research can be seen as a response to the social, ethical and practical implications of conventional research and its seeming inability or unwillingness to deal with complex, messy, real world problems. PR is based on a set of assumptions about the nature of society and about social science research that differ significantly from more conventional research paradigms. These assumptions may be expressed in two basic and interconnected themes: the relationship between knowledge and change and the relationships among various actors engaged in the research process. This article presents three approaches to PR from both a theoretical and practical perspective and three case studies of PR done in Guatemala, Mexico, and Ecuador. The author presents lessons learned and personal insights based on experiences doing PR in these three countries.*

**Key words:** action research, autonomous development, participatory research, indigenous knowledge, Latin America

## Introduction

A new paradigm for research is emerging under the rubric of participatory research (PR). PR<sup>5</sup> is a response to the social, ethical, and practical implications of more conventional research paradigms and their difficulties in dealing with complex, messy, real world problems. To frame the presentation of a PR paradigm, this article provides an overview of several research paradigms and details three PR approaches in both theory and practice. The practice of PR is illustrated through three case studies with each case expressing various aspects of the PR paradigm.

How PR is defined and practiced varies significantly by researcher. In fact, there seem to be as many terms for PR as there are people doing it. There is Participatory Research, Action Research, Participatory Action Research, Co-operative Inquiry, Community-based Participatory Research and the list goes on. At the 1997 Conference on Participatory Research more than 40 terms were used to refer to PR and its various forms (Fals Borda, 1998; Hall, 2005). Even using the term Participatory Research as a general term to cover the various approaches is contentious. Some of these difficulties occur because researchers may be unaware of their own theoretical assumptions. One way to sort out these assumptions is through the idea of research paradigm.

A research paradigm is a “basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of methods but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). More concretely, these belief systems include choices about rhetoric, practice and the role of values. Brown and Tandon (1983) posit that paradigms include an ideological dimension as well. However, the ideological dimensions of research paradigms are seldom addressed. Maguire (Maguire, 1987: 11) adds that research paradigms shape “in nearly unconscious and thus unquestioned ways ....what we label as problems, what problems we consider worth investigating and solving.” PR includes a reflective process about the assumptions of research be they ontological, epistemological, methodological, axiological, etc.

Distinct research paradigms are elaborated by Creswell (1989), Kemmis and McTaggart (2000), Maguire (1987) and Smith (1997). Smith<sup>6</sup> labels these paradigms as empirical-analytic, interpretive and liberatory. As categorization in itself can be seen as a particular way of representing the world, the following representation is meant as a simplified guide to stimulate reflection on research paradigms and the differences and similarities between PR approaches.

The empirical-analytic paradigm is the prevailing paradigm of research. In this paradigm, “the detached scientist asks questions or proposes a hypothesis, formulates a research design, and observes people from a distance, taking note of observable phenomena and verifiable, distinct facts. The underlying assumption is that ‘truth’ is represented by these observations and facts. The intent is to produce replicable, technical information that causally explains and predicts human behavior (Smith, 1997). From this perspective, the world is seen as “a system of distinct, observable variables, independent of the knower” (Maguire, 1987: 13). The horizon of the empirical-analytic paradigm is technical control.

An interpretive paradigm leads researchers to understand social phenomenon from the perspective of those involved. As Smith (1997: 118) explains, to an interpretive researcher,

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<sup>5</sup> I use Participatory Research as the general term to refer to this form of research to highlight that social relationships (forms of participation) largely determine how action occurs.

<sup>6</sup> Many of Smith’s ideas are based on Habermas as represented by Kemmis (Kemmis, 1991). Although Habermas’ (Habermas 1984) ideas become somewhat diluted, this typology is a useful way to summarize some of his ideas regarding empirical-analytic, hermeneutic, and emancipatory forms of knowledge generation.

“...different people have different, subjective perceptions of reality...there are therefore multiple realities and multiple truths. The knowledge emerging from an interpretive approach seeks to illuminate how “human interaction produces rules governing social life, rather than discovering universal truths of human interaction” (Maguire, 1987: 14). Accordingly, the horizon of the interpretive paradigm is to expand communication and understanding through dialogue.

A liberatory paradigm seeks to support personal and social transformation. As Maguire (1987:14) explained, liberatory research “help[s] people see themselves and social situations in new ways in order to inform further action for self-determined emancipation from oppressive social systems and relationships.” From a liberatory perspective, the social world is seen as collectively constructed within a historical context. Consequently, the horizon of the liberatory paradigm is social transformation leading to liberation. PR differs from an empirical-analytic paradigm in the way relationships between knowledge generation and practice are articulated and how social relationships within research areas appear in both theory and practice. The goal of the empirical-analytic paradigm is to generate new knowledge; the application of knowledge is a discrete and separate activity left to others. Those being researched are objects not subjects of the study. PR, in contrast, links the generation of knowledge with social change and re-defines the relationship between the outside researcher and others involved in the research process.

### **Methods**

The case study descriptions are a result of my critical reflection on each PR engagement and my role in it. The categories for reflection center on the relationship between knowledge and action and social relationships within the research process. Ideally, PR requires that a researcher recognize and make explicit his or her personal biases. My own bias is towards doing liberatory research that helps improve the well being of marginalized groups of people, especially indigenous people in the developing world. This is a stance that has evolved over time and has been influenced by the people who have been my co-researchers, colleagues, and friends in indigenous communities and developing countries. .

### **Three Approaches To PR**

To illuminate distinct traditions in PR, three main and historic approaches within PR are elaborated – Traditional Action Research (AR), Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Autonomous Development<sup>7</sup> (AD). This typology is a heuristic device to put into relief different approaches to PR, recognizing that the distinctions between various approaches are not clear-cut and are constantly shifting. Each of these approaches departs from the empirical-analytic paradigm and emphasizes distinct aspects of the PR paradigm. The primary distinctions are the ways each PR approach constructs the relationship between knowledge generation and change; the social relationships between the outside researcher and participants; and relationships among distinct groups of local participants engaged in a PR process.

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<sup>7</sup> AD sometimes referred to as people’s or grassroots development, is not usually considered a PR approach, yet is consistent with the general PR paradigm as described in this article.

### *Traditional Action Research*

Traditional action research (AR)<sup>8</sup> originated in industrialized countries as a new approach to addressing scientific questions and solving practical problems associated with the management of complex organizations such as factories and schools (Brown & Tandon, 1983; Lewin, 1946). Action Science was a precursor to AR (Argryis & Schon, 1989; Reason, 1994). In AR, the link between knowledge generation and change is seen as complementary (Edwards & Jones, 1976). AR values useful knowledge as a means to “make social systems more efficient and effective... to solve the problems of individuals or institutions” (Brown & Tandon, 1983). In this context, professional and non-professional researchers aim to bring about social change that is driven by both practical and scientific concerns.

AR recognizes the responsibility of research to help solve practical problems while at the same time contributing to social science theory. However, AR posits a consensus theory of society and tends to address problems already framed by authorities (Brown & Tandon, 1983). These two positions, one theoretical and one practical, lead AR researchers to assume that all participants in the research process share common interests, at least in solving the problem at hand. While AR stresses the need for both non-professionals and professionals to work together in the research and change process, this procedure may mask important societal and organizational inequalities and divergent interests based on them. Meanwhile, the researcher appears as an expert not on an equal footing with participants. Participants lend their knowledge, their opinion, and even their judgment to research. They may be involved at various stages, but participants do not have nor do they acquire control of the process itself. Ultimately control of the process and participation remains in the hands of experts (Selener, 1997; Thompson & Scoones, 1994).

Although AR moves beyond an empirical-analytic approach by focusing on useful knowledge in the context of social change, action and change remain at least conceptually under control. “Participation” risks remaining “instrumental”- not designed to lead to a continuous process of shared learning and true collaboration. Yet, recent action researchers have gone beyond these restrictions to produce more equalitarian forms of collaboration and co-learning (Elden & Levin, 1991; Englestad & Gustavsen, 1993; Greenwood & Levin, 1998). These efforts have occurred primarily in societies with less social hierarchy or where groups have recognized the hierarchical nature of society and have sought to change it through AR.

### *Participatory Action Research*

Participatory Action Research emerges from social change efforts in the developing world where poverty, conflict, and oppression were commonplace and knowledge and its generation were subject to elite control. The main aims of PAR are to generate practical knowledge, to apply this knowledge to developmental change that changes power relationships, and to bring about knowledge and change that in the long term lead to social transformation (Brown & Tandon, 1983). While PAR shares AR’s goal regarding the generation of practical knowledge, PAR recognizes the political implications of research and change (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991).

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<sup>8</sup> Budd Hall (Hall, 2005) describes that in the early 1970s, Fals Borda began doing PR under the term Action Research, Fals Borda soon however adopted the term Participatory Action Research to describe the emancipatory work that he and his colleagues were doing in Latin America.

Generally, PAR views society as unjust and therefore, inherently conflictual. The outside researcher appears as a change agent to help local people improve their lives. Interaction between outside researchers and local people occurs through an iterative process of *praxis* - dialogue, critical reflection, and action. Local people experience a process of *conscientização*, a process of increasing awareness that allows them to recognize oppression and its ramifications in their personal lives including elite control of knowledge production and its use (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Freire, 1970, 1990).

However, PAR does not completely escape the hierarchical relationship between “expert” and “participant.” Although in the literature the terms “catalyst” and “facilitator” have replaced the early PAR “vanguard” to describe the role of outsiders, these roles seem to imply that outside researchers have privileged knowledge that allows them to see what local people need. While in theory, the problem under investigation is identified by local people, it often happens that it is the outsider who recognizes the need for “empowerment.” These same researchers seem to know how this emancipatory process should occur and the point at which local people are empowered to such an extent that the outside researcher can leave (Sethi, 1993). This departure seems to imply that the outsider transfers knowledge to participants teaching them how to act and organize. When local people have acquired the necessary skills, the outsider leaves. Here again there appears at least an element of instrumentalizing local people by “experts.”

AR and PAR share a further trait, that of overlooking how “participants” may be internally differentiated. With a few notable exceptions, there is little recognition of internal differences within complex actors and social groups. Important and possibly decisive avenues of cooperation and creativity may be buried under general terms such as “community,” “peasant,” “clients,” or “stakeholders” (Carmen, 1996).

### *Autonomous Development*

Autonomous Development (AD) involves both an envisioning of the future and a response to modernization, ranging from solving everyday problems to engaging in major social change (Wignaraja, 1993). AD differs from and contributes to other PR approaches in the way it conceptualizes “research” and “development” as activities that are initiated by local people and rooted in local knowledge, culture, and ways of organizing (D. L. Ruonavaara, 2000). The aims of AD are that research, as practiced by local people, should generate practical knowledge; the application of this knowledge should lead to “developmental” change; and developmental change is defined and controlled by local people (Carmen, 1996; Chambers, 1990; Escobar, 1995; Esteva, 1995; Rahman, 1993). This is a clear departure from the apparent outsider-expert bias of AR and PAR. AR and PAR tend to assume that research and development only take place when outsiders are present. Indeed, many AD activities are “invisible” to outsiders. Farmers’ experimentation, transfers of knowledge within and between cultural groups, and community development efforts often go unnoticed (Carmen, 1996; Chambers, 1990, 1997; D. Ruonavaara, 1996). Hoping to become more visible and viable, marginalized groups in both urban and rural settings are beginning to organize regional, national, and even international networks to exchange information, create new knowledge, and bring about social change.

AD practitioners hold to no one theory of society. Rather, the involved actors determine a vision of society based on their worldviews, inter- and intra-community relationships, and placement in the local and global arena. Life, social or otherwise, may be viewed as conflictual, consensual, or in entirely different terms. Internal relationships are formed as people come together around mutual concerns. While differences, even conflict, may exist, a collective

identity coalesces. Ideally, horizontal relationships are established in which all participants are treated and act as equals contributing to the generation of knowledge to resolve shared problems. At the invitation of local people, the expert becomes a “participant” in the “collective construction of alternatives,” but an expert’s presence is not necessary (Escobar, 1995). The outside researcher is one participant among many who shares what he or she knows, but is not allowed to dominate.

### **A Case Study of Traditional Household Gardens In Guatemala**

The following case studies elaborate distinct aspects of PR, highlighting how social relationships are constructed in research and the link between knowledge generation and change. The first case study occurred in the Petén of Guatemala in 1995 with the goal of describing local traditional household gardens (THGs) and exploring their feasibility as an alternative agricultural technology for migrants from other ecological zones (D. Ruonavaara, 1996). My role in this research was to establish a dialogue with key gardeners to obtain information leading to insights into traditional gardens and garden practices. This research was requested by an international NGO doing garden promotion in the Petén and predicated on a need to understand local THGs in order to inform garden promotion efforts. Local gardeners were assumed to be holders of specialized knowledge that had value for and could contribute to the development of a sustainable gardening model. The social identity of gardeners, e.g. ethnicity, gender and class was problematized as a key aspect of the research. The choice of the PR approach and methods in this research was circumscribed by political and social violence still occurring in the country.

In the tropics, a THG is a small-scale, low input and multi-layered agricultural system located near the home. THGs are responsive to the local environment, developed by household members, based on local knowledge and a component of the larger family production system. Yet THGs of the Petén have been either invisible or not seen to their fullest social and environmental extent by researchers or development workers. This lack of visibility was due to pre-conceived notions of what a garden should be - orderly rows of garden crops, i.e. tomatoes, lettuce, carrots, etc. When gardens were not seen, development organizations assumed that there were no gardens present so garden promotion efforts began. However, the promoted garden model in the Petén was based on a temperate garden model using hybrid annual seeds, mechanization, chemical fertilizers, and pesticides. In effect, they were reduced-scale conventional agriculture. Despite low adoption rates and high failure rates, development organizations continued to promote gardens based on this model.

Gaining entry was a crucial aspect of this research. It was facilitated by an anthropologist with long-standing relationships in the region (Schwartz, 1990). In the past, other researchers had been accused by the community of usurping local knowledge and benefiting from it, while the community was left empty handed. Gaining entry was conditional on clarifying the intended benefits to the community. Once receiving permission, the researcher asked community members who they considered to be the most skilled and knowledgeable gardeners in their communities. These key gardeners provided in-depth understanding of THGs, describing the plants they grew, how they used them, and their garden management practices.

This research is interpretive in nature. The research reconstructed social relationships between researcher and “subjects.” The knowledge of key gardeners was valued, but the gardeners themselves did not have ultimate control over the research process or its results. While the research was intended to bring about change, change occurred after the researcher had departed. Development workers now realized that THGs existed and that local gardeners had

knowledge which could contribute to a sustainable gardening approach, yet there were no provisions made to establish an iterative link between the knowledgeable gardeners and garden promotion efforts that sought to incorporate aspects of THGs.

### **A Case Study Of Participatory Plant Breeding In Ecuador**

This case study took place from 2001-2007 in the northern highlands of Ecuador with the intent of developing new bean varieties appropriate for the social and environmental conditions of the region. The research was conducted with AfroEcuadorian, Quecha and *mestizo* communities in collaboration with the Instituto Nacional de Investigaciones Agropecuarias (INIAP) as part of the Bean Cowpea Collaborative Research Support Program (CRSP), Michigan State University (D. Ruonavaara, 2007). The researcher was asked to join the project as the social science researcher and gender and participatory research specialist. My role was to facilitate dialogue between professional plant breeders and farmers and to help ensure that women's voices were heard.

In Ecuador, beans play a vital role in farming systems and livelihoods of resource-poor farmers in the northern highlands. The northern highlands are the main production area of bush beans which are grown primarily by Afro-Ecuadorians. Yet these and other resource-poor farmers lack access to improved bean varieties and related technologies (Mazón, Peralta, & Ruonavaara, 2007). The conventional approach to plant breeding (CAPB) focuses on developing improved varieties on experiment stations separate from both the social and environmental context in which they are situated. Although, CAPB has resulted in varieties that provide higher yields and are resistant to biotic and abiotic stress, they are often unacceptable to local farmers (Sperling, 2003). Participatory Plant Breeding (PPB) in contrast, includes researchers and farmers working together in the development of new varieties on both research stations and in farmers' fields. INIAP in collaboration with the Bean Cowpea CRSP implemented Local Committees of Agricultural Research (CIAL) in various communities to evaluate and select improved bean varieties and related technologies appropriate for the agroecological and social contexts of northern Ecuador. CIALs provide a means to organize farmers and create a direct link between farmers and the formal agricultural research system (Ashby, J.T., & Braun, 2001). The CIAL members (both men and women) explicate their selection criteria for "good" beans and use these criteria to evaluate and select bean varieties. An iterative process of testing and development is established both in the farmers' fields and the research station. Once improved bean varieties are fully tested by the CIAL, they are released to the community and larger environ.

This PPB effort was informed by a theory of society that recognized the hierarchical nature of society and unequal distribution of knowledge. The relationship established between plant breeders and farmers sought to create a more egalitarian distribution of knowledge and agricultural resources to some of the country's most marginalized groups. However, while farmers participated in the research process they still to some degree were treated as objects while plant breeders privileged their own knowledge over that of farmers. The relationship between knowledge and change was bound by the creation of improved bean varieties and management practices; it did not intend to bring about societal change. Yet the CRSP activities began to exceed the bounds of PPB as CIAL members gained increased self-respect and became more aware of their own abilities to find solutions to production constraints and thereby improve their families' livelihood. Additionally, plant breeders learned of varietal preferences and began to recognize and value the knowledge of farmers. The formation of a national CIAL Association

has helped create a network across the country facilitating co-learning between CIAL members, researchers and other farmers.

### **A Case Study with Indigenous Communities In Mexico**

This case study occurred during 1997-2000 with the Permanent Seminar of Resources for Rural Development, known by its members simply as “the Seminar”(D. L. Ruonavaara, 2000). The Seminar holds monthly meetings in Oaxaca City and is affiliated with the Institute for Social Research at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. The Seminar emerged out of the turbulent environment of rural Mexico during the mid-1970s when peasant and indigenous communities were enmeshed in a long and often violent “struggle for the land.” During this time, several communities sought out academics that were willing to be “at the service of communities.” Twenty-some communities representing nine ethnic groups chose representatives who along with the academics became the Seminar. I was invited to join the Seminar to increase social diversity and contribute a distinct perspective to understand problematic situations brought to the Seminar by participating communities. Initially my engagement was defined as one of asking questions to stimulate members’ understanding; responding allowed for deeper reflection and clarification of thought. As my understanding grew and their trust in me increased I became their “mirror, echo and bridge” to a world they could not enter and which was at times incomprehensible.

Seminar members’ saw their identity primarily as a shifting intersection of culture, class, and gender. Yet each community had its own particular system of *usos y costumbres* (traditions) which distinguishes it from other communities (Dennis, 1976). Thus, the social diversity of the Seminar based was even greater than it first appeared. In the Seminar communication ideally occurred through dialogue. But dialogue is no easy matter in an organization composed of members who speak several different languages, represent different cultural groups, and includes Mexican academics, peasants, and a U.S. researcher. Spanish was the “official” language, but side discussions often occurred in various indigenous languages, especially among female members. The “logic of the *milpa*,” a concept unique to the Seminar, helps overcome these differences. This “logic” emerges from a melding of academic and indigenous reflection upon the local *milpa*, the traditional corn-based agroecological system found throughout Latin America. While the main crops of a traditional *milpa* are corn and beans, a *milpa* may contain as many as 40 species. These crops all have distinct properties that complement rather than compete with each other if properly managed in the *milpa*. Reflection on this biologically diverse system led Seminar members to consider the value of social diversity within the Seminar and its potential to lead to more creative and successful solutions to common problems. Based on this logic, Seminar members realize that there is a synergy to social interactions leading to more creative solutions than any one individual or a group of homogenous individuals could devise.

In this socially diverse atmosphere, each community representative would place his or her community’s problematic situation in front of the Seminar as a topic for discussion. All members indigenous and academic, men and women, would share their thoughts, experience and knowledge relating to the problem at hand. The community representative would then share the Seminar’s recommendations with their own community where decisions would be made and next steps identified. This process continued until the problem was resolved or diffused.

The Seminar posits at least a formal equality among diverse ways of knowing. This official equality among ways of knowing is extended to establish a model of equality among different members. It celebrates the diversity of participants, rather than homogenizing them

into separate categories of community, the oppressed, peasants, workers, experts or outsiders. The Seminar also overcomes the temporal boundaries of some PR approaches by creating an ongoing organizational entity where all participants in the research process seek to contribute to the resolution of problematic situations. In this setting, neither peasant nor academic can present him or herself as “the expert”, but rather each contributes as one unique perspective among many.

### **Conclusions**

Participatory Research is an alternative research paradigm appropriate for social situations that are complex and where knowledge is unevenly distributed. It is especially appropriate where research for the sake of knowledge generation is not sufficient, but rather there is a need for social change. In the various PR approaches, participation appears in differing forms and quality. The degree of integration between knowledge and action is predicated on these social relations.

AR tends to retain a hierarchical relationship between outside researchers and client groups. PAR, while advocating equality, distinguishes between outside researchers and local people who need to be “liberated.” AD stipulates that control of change begins with, and remains in the hands of local people. Outsiders may participate in, but not control, the research and development process. These various constructs of social relationships range from vertical to horizontal.

AR and PAR tend to homogenize “participant” groups as clients or the oppressed. The tendency is to overlook the complexity of various participant groups in the PR process. This tacit homogenization may repress the voices of subordinate sectors within participant groups. Conceptually AD, understands people in all their complexities and so there is at least the possibility that they will not make the same category mistakes of AR and PAR.

The paradigm of ideal types as represented by the earlier discussion of AR, PAR and AD can inform, but does not dictate the way PR is carried out. Given the practical and participatory nature of PR, how research unfolds is to varying degrees emergent. That is, given the particular way that the research evolves in part determines the way participation is manifested and the degree to which knowledge and action are linked. Additionally, which methods are appropriate is determined by their social acceptability and efficacy at expanding understanding and/or equality.

The TGH research in Guatemala drew primarily from an interpretative paradigm. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were utilized to further understanding of THGs from a local perspective. Participants served to illuminate a particular phenomenon (THGs) of which they had specialized knowledge. The researcher respected local people and their knowledge but did not engage with “participants” as equals. While there was a closer relationship between knowledge generation and change than in an empirical-analytic paradigm, there in was no iterative processes established for knowledge and practice to continually inform each other.

The Ecuadorian research recognized distinct roles for outside researchers and local people based on their specialized knowledge and its contribution to the development of improved bean varieties and production practices. Equality however was not assumed; rather respect was established between the two groups. Through CIALs, the relationship between knowledge generation and change was direct and ongoing at least as it applied to the topic of concern. This research drew on quantitative and qualitative methods but used them in a participatory fashion by empowering local people to employ them for a mutually agreed upon purpose.

In Mexico, the Seminar was concerned with the generation of useful knowledge; it understood the political implications of knowledge generation and control; it placed “popular” knowledge on an equal footing with scientific knowledge, and recognized dialogue among equals as the norm for participation. Social relationships in the Seminar were based on a pragmatic and eclectic image of a society composed of complicated and often conflictual relationships that directly impacted member communities both internally and externally. This conflict theory did not depend on a class analysis typical of most emancipatory research but rather was understood as a complex and shifting list of ingroup-outgroup conflicts.

Each of these PR efforts departs from the empirical-analytic paradigm and each represents distinct PR approaches. However, the way PR is carried out is not dictated by any one approach. The way research occurred was determined in part by the context in which it took place, the experience and bias of the PR researcher, who determined the problematic situation to be investigated and what that situation was, and the interest of the funder. In Guatemala, even talking about emancipatory research could put participants at risk. In Ecuador, the funders and collaborators defined the type of PR to be carried out. In Mexico, the researcher was invited to be a part of an ongoing process of community inquiry focusing on economic and cultural survival.

### **Lessons Learned**

In undertaking PR, a PR researcher should have a clear understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of both research paradigms and the PR approaches. When this is not done, the resulting research may be a confusing mix of distinct paradigmatic elements and PR approaches. The researcher first identifies the broad overarching question that the research seeks to answer. He or she then asks, what is the paradigmatic fit of this question – does it fall within an empirical-analytic, interpretative or emancipatory paradigm? The researcher then moves to a series of broad and iterative questions: What is the relationship between the knowledge generated by this research and change? What types of social relationships will be needed to bring about this change? Again the paradigmatic implications are assessed. Who are the research partners, colleagues, participants, and/or subjects? What types of social relationships are needed to achieve the objectives of the research? At this point a researcher must also examine a series of pragmatic issues, what are the interests and/or constraints imposed by others involved in the research process? What, if any, are the political, economic, military or other implication to the research and the participants? What are the funders’ interests if there is a funder? What do co-researchers need from this research? Ultimately a researcher must be self-reflective. Is the researcher able to acknowledge and face his or her own biases both before and during the research process? Can the researcher be humble enough and respectful enough to recognize other participants as equals and teachers? The PR researcher is also a product or outcome of the research process. Change occurs in the researcher as well. PR becomes not just a way of doing research but as a way of being, a way of relating to the world with commitment, respect and humility. If this does not happen PR remains just another research approach.

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