

**Social Research Association  
annual conference, 7 December 2005**

**‘Participatory Approaches to  
Research and Inquiry into Poverty’:**

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# Outline

- **Report - written for Joseph Rowntree Foundation with Moraene Roberts**
- **Participatory approaches: in principle**
- **Links with other approaches**
- **Added value and/or additional issues?**
- **Participatory approaches: in practice**
- **Conclusions**

# **‘From Input to Influence’**

- Originated with ATD Fourth World and co-written with Moraene Roberts, activist
- Designed as overview of participatory research on poverty in UK
- Amended remit to ‘participatory approaches’ and ‘research and inquiry’
- Supported by Joseph Rowntree Foundation

# Process of producing the report

- Not conceived of as participatory process
- Moraene Roberts was consultant (5 days)
- (Informal) advisory group, including people with experience of poverty, to guide it
- Drew on links with ATD Fourth World and Oxfam/Institute for Development Studies
- Not 'how to' guide, or about participation
- Importance of research - for what knowledge counts, + for debate on poverty

# Participatory approaches: in principle

- Not 'subjective' to add to 'objective'
- Not just adding colour or quotes to report
- Not limiting involvement to 'witnessing'
- Not maximum participation in research  
BUT
- Respecting expertise from experience
- And greater control by those taking part

# Links with other approaches

- Emphasis on user involvement/control
- Co-operative inquiry to solve problems
- Feminist research practices
- Emancipatory research
- Within research on poverty: ethics of research; 'agency' of people in poverty; emphasis in international development on non-material aspects and on participation

# **Added value and/or additional issues?**

- Arguments for added value include: right to define own realities; capacity building (for researchers and participants); improving quality of research (unique?)
- Who: label of poverty can be problematic
- How: employ participants as researchers?
- What: holding mirror up to poverty?
- Constraints: time, resources, relationships

# Participatory approaches: in practice

John Gaventa, IDS, 2003: 'The ideal type of participatory research requires that the "community" take the lead – defines the research problem, develops the approach, invites the "researcher", gathers and analyses the data, disseminates the information and, if it is desired, continues with the process of the research afterwards. Most real projects are collaborative action research – a combination between our knowledge and other people's knowledges. In this we try to take away the hierarchies of the collaboration to create a more equal and two-way dynamic between the "researcher" and the "researched".'

# **Participatory approaches: poverty research in UK**

## **Poverty First Hand (Beresford et al, 1999)**

- National level project – but limited funding
- Selection of participants: self-definition?
- Group discussions: sustained, inclusive?
- Semi-structured: more participant control?
- Transcriptions returned to participants
- Word for word quotes, minimal comment
- Draft of report shown to participants

# **Participatory approaches: poverty on an international scale**

## **Voices of the Poor (World Bank, 2000/01)**

- Large-scale – involved 60,000 participants
- Some ‘participatory’ studies; but tight timetable + quantitative research tradition
- Feedback to communities + further help
- Analysis of studies without participants
- Important themes (including power)
- Development model not a blueprint

# **Participatory approaches: Commission inquiry**

## **Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power (UK Coalition against Poverty)**

- Mix of grassroots + public life participants
- Investigating barriers to participation
- Joint inquiry process, experimental
- Report meant to be 'different': audiences?
- Evaluation: open recruitment; negotiate processes; support; time to build trust

# **Participatory approaches: long-term joint investigation**

## **Pooling Knowledge on Poverty**

(ATD Fourth World, mid 1990s)

- 3-year project, involving activists living in poverty, volunteer workers and academics
- 5 topics studied/written about: citizenship; work; family; history; knowledge/learning
- Had to break down barriers + build respect
- Shared human experiences vital to this

# Conclusions

- Low expectations (adaptive preferences)?
- Static conception of poverty?
- Relative weight on different perspectives?
- Overview of participatory approaches to research/inquiry into poverty in UK
- Place of participatory research in broader aspects of participation/anti-poverty strategies in UK and elsewhere