You can't clap with one hand: Learnings to promote culturally grounded participatory action research with migrant and former refugee communities[☆]

Philippa Collie [a,*], James Liu [a], Astrid Podsiadlowski [b,a], Sara Kindon [c]

[a] Centre for Applied Cross-Cultural Research, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand
[b] Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien (Vienna University of Economics and Business), Austria
[c] School of Geography, Environment and Earth Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This paper considers how researchers can undertake culturally grounded participatory action research (PAR) with migrant and former refugee communities whose relational network, customs and social hierarchy are perceived to be under threat. It draws on learnings from a PAR-inspired ethnographic study with young Assyrian women, who experienced tension with the bottom-up, participant-centred and social change-oriented ideals of PAR. Participants preferred to discuss their experiences with the researcher and have their views publicized anonymously through a research report than to work with her on an action project to address the issues that they raised. The young women wanted adults in their community to understand their desire to adapt some Assyrian cultural norms so that they could 'fit in' better in New Zealand society, but feared they would be criticised if they conveyed this in a public way. This experience showed that it is important to ground tools and processes in participants' own goals and sociocultural contexts, which may not always be immediately apparent. Projects that acknowledge and work with participants' relational networks are more likely to be effective in communities whose social fabric and customs are perceived to be under threat than those that attempt to 'mobilise' a sub-group within it to achieve social change.

© 2009 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

This paper considers how researchers can undertake participatory action research (PAR) with former migrant and refugee communities to achieve culturally grounded outcomes that benefit the community and contribute to academic knowledge and theory. PAR is a collaborative form of applied research that is undertaken to understand and resolve an issue affecting a group of people (Kindon, Pain, & Kesby, 2007; Pain, 2004; Williams, 2004). This approach emphasises the value of conducting research *with* (rather than on) people to share knowledge and stimulate action to challenge social inequalities and facilitate the positive development of the target group, moving away from the top-down, theory testing models of earlier models of action research (Gustavsen, 2001; Pain, 2005). It recognises that people have knowledge about how their life situations could be improved and can contribute to the achievement of more sustainable, relevant and effective outcomes for research and development projects that concern them. Thus, PAR practitioners strive to maximise participant control and ownership over

---

the design and implementation of the research, with a particular focus on hearing the views of people whose opinions are often dominated by others (Kindon, 2005; Pain, 2004; The Next, 2003). The extent that a research process promotes a better understanding of the situation and strengthens the capacity of participants to face their future is given utmost importance in PAR, with the recognition that 'action' can be obstructed for many circumstantial reasons (Swantz, 2003).

PAR practitioners are advised to facilitate research processes in a way that is responsive to participants' characteristics and sociocultural context (Chambers, 2002; Chawla, 2001; Kesby, 2000; Keys, McMahon, Sanchez, London, & Abdul-Adil, 2004; Kindon et al., 2007; Mohatt et al., 2004). However, cultural differences are often overlooked in project plans (Carnegie et al., 1998; Keys et al., 2004) and the value that PAR itself places on participant-centred, bottom-up processes may conflict with cultural frameworks that are common in many migrant and refugee communities in Western societies.

This paper presents the learnings from a PAR-inspired ethnographic study with young Assyrian women in New Zealand. Assyrians are an ethnic group of Christian faith who originate from Iraq and the surrounding countries. Almost 60% of New Zealand's total Assyrian population of 1680 reside in Wellington, where the research took place (Statistics New Zealand, 2007). Many New Zealanders of European or Māori descent are unfamiliar with the Assyrian ethnic group, and assume that they are Muslims (Armstrong et al., 2005).

The study with young Assyrian women was instigated to gain better knowledge of their settlement experiences in New Zealand and to identify ways to support them to positively adjust to life in this country. The need for this research was highlighted after a needs assessment for Assyrian youth (Armstrong et al., 2005) revealed concerns about how the young women were doing at school and were adjusting to gender roles in this country, but was only able to obtain the input from Assyrian boys and adults. The needs assessment indicated that Assyrian young people in New Zealand – like their counterparts in Australia, Sweden and the United States (Badal, 2001; Cetrez, 2005; Gow et al., 2005) – are adopting the culture and language of their new country at a faster rate than their parents (i.e. they are experiencing an 'acculturation gap' – Kegler, Young, Marshall, Bui, & Rodine, 2005; Lin, 1986; Schapiro, 1988; Zhou, 1997). This gap has been described as a particular source of tension in Assyrian refugee and migrant communities, as the long-standing persecution that has threatened their ethnocultural group has made retaining their culture extremely important to them (Badal, 2001; Cetrez, 2005). Yet, little research has been conducted with Assyrians to understand how they are managing concerns about cultural maintenance and adaptation in their societies of settlement.

Both academic and community research goals were formed for the proposed research so that – in line with the principals of PAR – the research could make a positive contribution to the local community while informing academic knowledge construction. The community research goal was "*To facilitate a research process that is a positive experience for the participants, in which their views are heard and respected, and there is an opportunity to initiate and \ or participate in a project to address issues concerning them.*" The academic goals were refined over the course of the research to focus on how the young women managed expectations and assumptions about how they should 'adapt' or 'maintain' their culture (in light of the 'acculturation gap' mentioned above); and exploring what influences the educational and career pathways that young Assyrian women take in New Zealand.

This paper considers the methodological learnings that took place as the research team engaged in an iterative process to develop and progress these academic and community goals. It explores tension between the bottom-up, participant-centred and social change-oriented ideals of PAR and the necessity of facilitating a process that is appropriate in the given sociocultural context.

1. Methodology

1.1. Participants

The first author spoke with 60 young women (between 16 and 25 years) and 72 Assyrian adults (53 women and 19 men) across over 400 h of ethnographic research, focus groups and interviews. Participants had lived in New Zealand for between 18 months and 20 years, with most having resided in this country for between 3 and 11 years.

All of the young women and a number of adults participating in the research were relatively fluent in spoken English. An interpreter provided translation support for several of the conversations with Assyrian adults.

1.2. The process

The first author spent the first year of the research engaging in ethnographic conversations with Assyrians at community events (e.g. weddings and picnics) and spaces (e.g. their church and in family homes) to gain understanding about their culture and experiences, and to scope collaborative research opportunities. She found that her Assyrian contacts offered advice for the development of the research methods and questions, but did not want to take on the role of 'research partners'.

With the consent of community leaders a series of five focus groups and six semi-structured interviews were held with young Assyrian women at the end of this scoping phase to learn about their settlement and school experiences in New Zealand and to explore opportunities to address issues raised in a PAR project. The focus groups took place at the participants' high school, with between 4 and 13 students participating in each session, whilst interviews were held at the participants' homes or at a café, according to their wishes. A core of eight young women attended all – or almost all – focus groups, and three attended both focus groups and interviews. Interviews were also held with four Assyrian parents (two mothers, two

fathers), and two teachers who taught at the participants' school. The research team's Assyrian advisors recommended their involvement to gain a holistic understanding of the young women's experiences and because effective action to address solutions proposed during the research would require an interconnected approach.

In light of the advice of local Assyrians, the focus groups and interviews covered topics about the young women's perceptions of school, their expectations for the future, and on family relationships. Following the recommendation of researchers specialising in promoting youth participation in research (e.g. Chawla, 2001; Coomaraswamy et al., 1998; Ivan-Smith & Johnson, 1998), some creative and interactive activities were prepared to help the researcher get to know participants and create a relaxed, youth-friendly atmosphere. This included warm-up games and making posters to illustrate people's perceptions of Assyrian girls, which were well-received by the young women.

The methodology, complementary academic research questions and subsequent analyses were also informed by an ongoing dialogue with a research team made up of the other authors who are academics from diverse ethnicities and areas of specialisation (from human geography and participatory development, to social and cross-cultural psychology). This team acted as a sounding board and iterative feedback loop for the first author to reflect on the implications of her observations for the project and for academic theory.

1.3. Verification and analysis of research findings

In accordance with the principles of PAR, the first author clarified and verified the accuracy of research material (e.g. field notes and interview transcripts) in follow-up discussions with participants. Once research material was verified, a thematic analysis was undertaken to organise patterned responses from the data corpus (field notes and interview and focus group transcripts) into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These themes and the key research findings were checked with participants and scrutinised by the research team to assess whether they were valid.

2. Results

2.1. Key learnings about participants' sociocultural context

Over the course of the research, the research team identified two major cultural patterns that had implications for the research methodology and how the project proceeded. Firstly, Assyrians repeatedly asserted that people in their community are very close to each other, have a strong group identity, and are extremely loyal to their family and friends. Indeed, the research team observed numerous Assyrians making sacrifices for their family and relatives; working long hours in menial jobs and sacrificing personal career development opportunities so that they could send money to relations overseas or help their family to pay off debt.

Participants demonstrated loyalty to their family and other Assyrians by moderating their responses when they apparently realised that they may have cast them in a negative light. For example, the young women often expressed a wish that their parents and older Assyrians could be more flexible with Assyrian customs now that they are living in New Zealand. At the same time, they showed sympathy with their elders' perspectives, acknowledging that they have difficulty adjusting to life in a new country (e.g. *"it's hard for them to understand"* – Erin[1]), and that their family risks getting a bad name if they are caught doing something that conflicts with traditional Assyrian customs.

The young women's concern about how their family is viewed by members of their community, and the consideration that they put into the expectations and viewpoints of other Assyrians is aligned with the notion of relational collectivism. This refers to the degree of connectedness people have to others within their immediate relational network, such as in the reciprocal relationships they have with family and friends (Brewer & Chen, 2007; Kagitcibasi, 1997, 2005, 2007). This can be differentiated from normative individualism-collectivism, which is concerned with the extent that group interests are prioritised over individual interests (Kagitcibasi, 1997, 2005, 2007).

The close networks observed among Assyrians may in part be due to their position – both in New Zealand and in Iraq – in a small ethnic minority group whose culture is 'threatened' by the dominance of surrounding cultures. Certainly, participants emphasised the importance of retaining their links with each other and their culture, values and language in this country; and were eager to dispel negative stereotypes and misconceptions about people from the Middle East that they encountered in their day-to-day interactions with (other) New Zealanders.

Another aspect of the Assyrian culture that had implications for how the research project developed is the importance that Assyrians place on respect for authority and following rules and obligations. This value was exemplified by the high regard Assyrians show for their Church leaders and the older people in the community; and the importance placed on young people behaving appropriately and respecting decisions made for them by adults–including, in some cases, whom they should marry. This set of values was demonstrated by one young woman when she was asked what Assyrian values and traditions she would like her future (hypothetical) children to learn: *"Like go to church (.) and (.) respect (…) respect us (.) and their grandfather and mother and stuff (.) and respect their uncles and aunties which I won't even have aunties (.) respect the father's side"*.

---

[1] All names used to represent participants are pseudonyms.

The value that Assyrians place on respect and fulfilling the expectations of others can be linked with Schwartz's (1999) 'hierarchy' dimension of culture, which refers to what principles are emphasised in a society to ensure that its members behave responsibly and co-exist well with others. The response to this issue that appears to be dominant in the Assyrian community is to emphasise the legitimacy of hierarchical stratification and the importance of people following the obligations and rules associated with their roles (which is analogous to Hofstede's, 2001 notion of 'high power distance). Kagitcibasi's (1970) research with Turkish high school students suggests that respect for authority as a social value reflects a desire to behave appropriately and accept the decisions of those whom one holds in high regard, rather than submitting to authority with blind, unquestioning obedience.

In New Zealand, egalitarianism (or 'low power distance' – Hofstede, 2001) tends to be endorsed as an alternative to hierarchy as a way of promoting responsible behaviour. Egalitarianism emphasises the desirability of treating others as equals and cooperating to promote the welfare of everyone (Hofstede, 2001; Schwartz, 1999). The research team observed this different cultural emphasis had implications for the young women's acculturation process, as they reacted to apparent 'freedom' at school and formed new expectations around how much autonomy they should have from their parents. At the same time, their psychological interdependence with their parents remained, supporting Kagitcibasi's (2003, 2005, 2007) concept of the 'autonomous-related self'. As detailed below, the efficacy of the PAR approach for these young women was influenced by their desire to demonstrate the value they place on autonomy, relatedness and respect for authority.

2.2. Attempt to develop a culturally appropriate applied research project

Over the course of the research, it became apparent that the liberal, egalitarian values and the focus on social change that underpins PAR do not sit easily with the inclination towards relational collectivism and hierarchy values in the Assyrian community. This was demonstrated from the start of the research project, when the first author attempted to find young Assyrian women who would work with her as 'research partners' to design and implement a collaborative project. The young women that the researcher encountered indicated their support for the project. However, they declined invitations to develop the research questions and work on the project *with* the researcher, preferring to follow her direction as per conventional 'researcher' and 'participant' roles. One commented that she was happy to answer questions, but that it was the *researcher's* job to write and ask them.

Accordingly, the research team adjusted their approach in consultation with their Assyrian contacts, preparing focus groups and interviews to progress the academic research goals and explore opportunities for applied research outcomes in a more structured setting. In response to the observed cultural patterns, questions were phrased in a way that allowed participants to express their views without implicating their own family in negative behaviour. For example, the following question ascertained what participants thought they would like their relationships with their own hypothetical children to be like, rather than focusing on 'problems' with intergenerational relations now: *"If you were a parent, how would you bring up your children? What would your relationship between you and your children be like?"*

The young women's focus groups did not include Assyrian adults, following advice that they would express their views more freely among their peers. Adults were interviewed separately with the expectation that the two groups might be brought together at a later date to work through shared concerns that were raised. The first author was prepared to act as an 'intermediary' if necessary to help the parents, young women and teachers bridge understandings with each other (see Chataway, 1997).

The interviews and focus groups highlighted several potential areas of focus for a follow-up collaborative project: discontent with the amount of gossip in their community; encouraging their peers to be proud of their culture; challenging prejudice and stereotyping that they experience; and the desire to adapt some Assyrian customs so that the young women have more 'freedom' now that they're living in New Zealand. Some adults also spoke of the desire to adapt some Assyrian customs and suggested that they had to be more like 'friends' to their children in New Zealand; others expressed anxiety that young Assyrians were taking on New Zealand ways. It was clear that adults were more interested in discussing the number of young Assyrian women leaving school before graduating. However, the young women generally did not consider the school achievements of their peers to be something that required intervention.

At the conclusion of the focus groups, the research team invited the young women to undertake a PhotoVoice (photography) project[2] to express the challenges they experience adjusting to life in New Zealand. It was hoped that this visual medium would offer them the opportunity to communicate their views to parents, teachers and peers in an accessible way. It was anticipated that an exhibition displaying the photos produced would open up discussion for applied research possibilities and help select the topic on which the young women and adults could focus further work.

However, whilst the young women enthusiastically agreed to do the project, they took few photographs and were clearly participating for the researcher's benefit only, asking *"What do you want us to take photos of again?"* Eventually they informed the first author that they no longer wanted to do PhotoVoice or an alternative project and requested that she instead write up their views anonymously in a report for Assyrian adults and their teachers to read.

---

[2] 'PhotoVoice' is a methodological tool in which participants take photos about what they like about their community, and what they would like to see changed. It is a visual way of showing how they conceptualise their circumstances (see Darbyshire, MacDougall, & Schiller, 2005; Strack, Magill, & Magill, 2004).

2.3. Developing project outputs and outcomes

This anonymous, indirect approach through an 'official' (research) channel appeared to be more suited to the young women's sociocultural context and the topic that they were most motivated to address than a public PhotoVoice project. As the project progressed, it became apparent that the research outcome that was most desirable to the young women was for Assyrian adults to understand their wish to adapt some traditional Assyrian customs so that they could have a lifestyle that was more similar to their New Zealand peers (e.g. being allowed to date or go out with their friends unchaperoned). At the same time, they wanted to retain their close links with their culture and community, and were unsure how to convey their complex views in a photograph without upsetting their elders, causing controversy or making their community look bad. They were eager to show respect to Assyrian adults and to act according to their expectations. The careful way that the young women positioned themselves as they managed various loyalties and desires highlighted the contested and negotiated nature of their acculturation processes, as they switched between supporting different acculturation orientations (e.g. from assimilation to integration) within moments of a conversation. This was documented to inform academic theory and practitioners working with young Assyrian women in research publications and presentations (e.g. Collie, 2007; Collie, Kindon, Liu, & Podsiadlowski, in press), as well as in the research report written for the community.

The development of an anonymous, written document as the action-oriented research outcome overcame the young women's desire to maintain the solidarity of their community, as it allowed them to explain their complex views in greater depth without causing offence or appearing disloyal. The document option also enabled the young women to present a unified representation of their ethnic group and experiences as young Assyrian women to New Zealanders who had never encountered an Assyrian before. Furthermore, through this mechanism they could negotiate a collective opinion on the topic of cultural maintenance and adaptation, rather than having their personal views highlighted and expressed through photographs. This may have been particularly appealing because many of the young women did not seem to have a clear idea of how they wanted to position their views on this topic—as demonstrated by the way that they switched between proclaiming their desire for cultural maintenance and adaptation (see Collie et al., in press). These observations correspond with Jupp's (2007) comment that participants' multiple understandings and experiences may not be able to be easily depicted within the visual representations that are common among participatory techniques.

The document option also appealed to the young women because it diffused their identity more easily than a photographic display and allowed them to take a 'backseat' role in the project without violating expectations for the role of young Assyrian women in the community. As alternative project ideas were explored, it became clear that the young women did not feel they had the right or authority to publicly represent their community (*"it is not up to us to decide about a project like that"*). Furthermore, they were doubtful that the outcomes of the PhotoVoice project would be taken seriously or acted upon without an explicit endorsement from Assyrian leaders. Thus, they did not want to risk participating in a project that could jeopardize their reputations and relationships in the Assyrian community without the certainty of delivering any positive change.

Accordingly, the research team presented the report – and the Assyrian and Arabic translations – to community leaders, inviting them to act on the findings as they saw fit. The report was also circulated to organisations with an interest in settlement and educational outcomes for young Assyrian women (e.g. the school where the research was held, New Zealand Council of Educational Research; Ministry of Education; New Zealand Federation of Ethnic Councils), to inform their ongoing work.

The report was targeted at a broad audience, so that it could help bridge understanding between teachers, Assyrian young women and Assyrian adults regarding the young women's desire for both cultural maintenance and adaptation. It also aimed to provide insight into what influences the educational and career pathways that young Assyrian women take. The report explained the challenges that the young women encounter as they adjust to the New Zealand school system, teaching style, and English-language curriculum.

The report documented the various stakeholders' suggestions for how teachers and parents could improve communication with one another and enhance how they support young Assyrian women with their studies. This included giving parents opportunities to share accounts of their own school experiences with teachers, and writing school reports in plain English. The report also recommended that teachers directly offer assistance to Assyrian students when they appear to be struggling, as they often find it difficult to ask for it, and may not be able to get English-language study help at home. Similarly, it noted that teachers can be a crucial source of career and course advice to the young women, and that it is important that the school's career evenings give practical guidance to help Assyrian parents and students access the information they need to make informed decisions about their future. Meanwhile, the Assyrian community was recommended to establish a support or mentor network of Assyrians who are able and willing to help the young people with their schoolwork, and parents were encouraged to attend a 'Home-School Partnership' programme that the school was currently piloting to improve parent-teacher communication.

Following the distribution of the report, several young women commented that teachers were being more 'understanding' and that they were getting more help with their schoolwork. Two years later teachers reported that Assyrian girls were 'doing better' at the school; truanting less and staying at school longer to achieve their final qualifications. Members of the Assyrian community speculated that this could be because they were getting more

accustomed to the school system in New Zealand. However, they also noted that the process of participating in the research – and the fact that some New Zealanders had taken an interest in them – had made them feel more 'welcomed' in this country, giving them more confidence to invest effort into study, without worrying that it would be wasted at the hands of discrimination. At this time – and in line with the report recommendations – funding had been made available for a female Assyrian young adult to act as a mentor and career advisor for the young women at the school. Additionally, the ongoing dialogue that the first author had with teachers informed the continual adaptations that the school was making to improve communication with Assyrian parents.

For Assyrian parents, the report summarised some underlying New Zealand educational philosophies, to help them understand the different teaching and behavioural strategies, and expectations around parental involvement. Furthermore, those participating in the research were shown how to access information about career and study opportunities for themselves and for their daughters; and had the chance to practice their English and receive help to complete forms or read texts. Likewise, the young women participating in the research gained help with their studies and advice about their future career path; shared and acquired knowledge about the achievements of their Assyrian ancestors; and had the opportunity to participate in a soccer and volleyball team for Assyrian girls, which was organised during the research process.

3. General discussion: implications for acculturation research

A number of learnings can be drawn from this experience for how PAR can be tailored to more effectively support the development of migrant or former refugee communities, particularly those who have a strong respect for authority and whose relational networks and culture are perceived to be under threat. In particular, it highlights the importance of considering the sociocultural context when identifying the best vehicle and approach for achieving improved social outcomes in that community. This includes consideration about the appropriate structure through which the project can be initiated; and the design of project activities and facilitation approach to give participants a safe, culturally grounded framework in which they can express their views. Whether 'action' develops or not, the research ethics of the PAR approach can help develop a project that is of richer value for both participants and academia.

3.1. Working backwards from the desired outcome to determine the applied research approach

PAR practitioners are advised to maximise participant control and ownership over research decisions (Kindon, 2005; Nieuwenhuys, 2004; Pain, 2005; The Next, 2003) At the same time, it is noted that some participants may require more guidance, support and leadership than others (Kindon, 2005; Pridmore, 1998). PAR practitioners are thus advised to develop an approach that is responsive to the local sociocultural context through working closely with research partners (Chataway, 1997; Coomaraswamy et al., 1998; Mohatt et al., 2004; Westby & Hwa-Froclich, 2003).

The flaw in this approach is that it may not be evident who are appropriate partners, or whose advice one should follow from the range of opinions offered. The project with young Assyrian women showed that it is easy for a researcher who is from outside the community to mistakenly *think* that they are on the right track to establishing a culturally appropriate PAR project when local people are happy to cooperate with them to plan and \ or participate in project activities. Yet, this cooperation may be influenced by the desire to maintain a positive interpersonal relationship with the researcher and fulfill the conventional 'participant' role to help them with what they see as *their* project. Furthermore, a research approach or method that initially appeals to participants or to the researcher may not necessarily be the best way to achieve their desired outcomes.

This experience demonstrates that gaining a thorough understanding of the local sociocultural context is not only critical for developing appropriate methods, but also for identifying who should participate in the research; the role that participants wish to play; and what may drive or hinder their motivation to act on the research outcomes. Researchers may struggle to find willing research partners if they scope the possibility of conducting a PAR project before assessing whether this is the most appropriate way to achieve the desired outcome. Other researchers have also found that participants with little time, research experience or familiarity with participatory research processes may prefer to follow the researcher's direction and 'participate' in the project than to act as research partners (Isenberg, Loomis, Humphreys, & Maton, 2004; Keough, 1998; Pridmore, 1998; Rew & Rew, 2003; Simpson, Wood, & Daws, 2003). This highlights the need for the researcher and community members to first clarify the outcome they want and then work backwards to determine how this can be achieved and who has a role to play in achieving it (e.g. similar to Mark Friedman's Results Based Accountability process, see Friedman, 2006).

As researchers work with community members to determine desired outcomes and methodologies, they may need to explicitly consider the implications of taking action on the proposed topic. A topic that participants are eager to talk about might not necessarily be one that they want to – or are able to – work together to address. In communities with strong relational networks projects that acknowledge and work with the interdependent interpersonal relationships within the community are likely to be more positively received than projects that attempt to mobilise a social group within it and threaten to cause interpersonal conflict. Indeed, Liu, Sik-hung Ng, Gastardo-Conaco, and Wong (2008) suggest that an Asian epistemology for Action Research grounds the process in the principles of interconnectedness, noting that in Confucian tradition *"knowledge must be put into the service of the community, and the way this happens is through a web of social relations that include power and status differentials"* (p. 1171).

3.2. Determining an appropriate structure through which to initiate applied research

In migrant and former refugee communities with a clearly defined hierarchical structure and strong relational networks it may be wise for researchers to work with decision-makers within an existing community structure to establish an agreed research topic and approach, going beyond merely attaining the 'consent' of leaders at the start of the project as recommended in the literature (e.g. Choudry, Jandu, Mahal, & Sing, 2002; Westby & Hwa-Froclich, 2003). The involvement of the leadership may come through their role at the head of functional structures that have a mandate to promote the welfare of community members, such as a religious council or a community association or board. Such structures may be a more appropriate unit for action than a social category (e.g. young women) in a community with relational collectivist values, as working primarily with a particular group could encourage unwelcome divisiveness.

Of course, the chosen structure through which to initiate a project needs to be selected carefully, as committees and boards have varying degrees of effectiveness in any culture. It is important that the group itself does not have an agenda to exclude certain people or groups within the population they are supposed to be representing from their activities; and undertake to attain genuine input into the research and action, so that it reflects the will of their community and not the particular personalities on the board. A researcher can help ensure that a range of perspectives are heard and that the action will benefit those who are most in need. If a more collaborative, 'research partnership' approach is not appropriate or desired, researchers can be attuned to participants views when making research decisions through attaining their input in a structured manner, such as giving them multiple options to choose from and prioritise in matrix or participatory diagramming activities (see Alexander et al., 2007).

It may be only after a project has been authorised through an appropriate decision-making structure that it is possible for a researcher to take on an 'intermediary' role to improve communication between groups. This requires agreement on what is the primary issue of concern, and for both parties to be motivated to achieve change. When a group wants other members of their community to hear their views, but others are ambivalent towards their aspirations, it may be appropriate for researchers to relay the group's perspectives on their behalf, such as in the anonymous report created in the present project.

3.3. The value of incorporating PAR ethics into applied research

The project with the young Assyrian women showed how incorporating the ethics of the PAR approach can enhance outcomes for both academia and participants, regardless of whether or not participants are motivated to undertake 'collective action'. For example, the research team's PAR-inspired commitment to understanding the young women's perspectives accurately and giving them a say in how they were represented in the research helped to establish strong trust and a positive rapport between the participants and the first author. This in turn enhanced the richness and accuracy of the data produced, as participants spoke more freely and clarified misunderstandings or vague comments at follow-up meetings with the researcher. This process helped the research team understand the complex ways in which the young women negotiated the acculturation process (see Collie et al., in press), adding depth to quantitative studies that show attitudes towards psychological constructs such as Berry's (2001) acculturation orientations at a single moment in time. In turn, the participants' complex views were relayed to their elders and teachers in a report – informing the school's ongoing efforts to support their achievement at school – and in the process they gained confidence and career\study advice through their interactions with the New Zealand researcher.

3.4. Conclusion

PAR values participatory processes that challenge social inequalities and support people sitting outside seats of power to seek social change to address issues affecting their lives. The attempt at PAR with young Assyrian women illustrated that this approach may not be the best way to achieve improved social realities in communities whose cultural values and social fabric is under threat. Notably, the very notion of social change can be a contentious subject for members of migrant and former refugee communities who are seeking to preserve cultural norms and values that differ from those of the wider society. A PAR process that works with and aims to strengthen participants' relational networks is therefore likely to be more effective in such communities.

Researchers who enter a community with a PAR-inspired desire to facilitate research and action that will be a valuable experience for participants should be aware that 'action' can come in many forms. The listening ear and sensitive pen of someone willing to communicate views between groups may sometimes be all that is required for action on a complex and contentious issue. Researchers from outside the community may be in an ideal position to take on an 'intermediary' role to help address a divisive issue. However, this cannot be done without a considerable time investment and the willingness of all parties to work through the issue in this way.

All-in-all, researchers committed to PAR ethical principles must be prepared to adapt the process so that it best meets what the community wants to achieve. To be effective, critical reflection on how the sociocultural and situational context is affecting the knowledge and action produced is required (Alexander et al., 2007; Jupp, 2007). Through grounding projects in participants' goals and sociocultural context in this way, richer results can be delivered for both the participants and academia.

Acknowledgements

References

Alexander, C., Beale, N., Kesby, M., Kindon, S., McMillan, J., Pain, R., et al. (2007). Participatory diagramming: A critical view from North East England. In S. Kindon, R. Pain, & M. Kesby (Eds.), *Participatory action research approaches and methods. Connecting people, participation and place* (pp. 112–121). Oxon: Routledge.

Armstrong, L., Blakey, F., Collie, P., Eshow, E., Leathers, A., Koshin, H., et al. (2005). *Participatory action research (PAR) with Assyrian Youth*. Wellington: Prepared for GEOG 404 and the Wellington Regional Summit on Refugee Health and Well-being.

Badal, A. (2001). *A qualitative case study of the psychossocial effects of acculturative stress and forced displacement of Assyrian-Iranian refugees living in the United States*. Santa Barbara, CA: The Fielding Institute. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation.

Berry, J. W. (2001). A psychology of immigration. *Journal of Social Issues, 57*(3), 615–631.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*, 77–101.

Brewer, M. B., & Chen, Y. (2007). Where (who) are collectives in collectivism? Toward conceptual clarification of individualism and collectivism. *Psychological Review, 114*(1), 133–151.

Part 4: Culture: Attitudes and perspectives. (1998). Carnegie, R., Harrison, K., Halasah, S., Obeng, C., Stephens, D., Woodhead, M., Johnson, V., Ivan-Smith, E., Gordon, G., Pridmore, P., & Scott, P. (Eds.). *Stepping forward: Children and young people's participation in the development process* (pp. 119–153). London: Intermediate Technology Publications.

Cetrez, Ö. A. (2005). *Meaning-making variations in acculturation and ritualization: A multi-generational study of Suroyo migrants in Sweden*. Psychologica et Sociologia Religionum, 17, Uppsala, Sweden: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis.

Chambers, R. (2002). *Participatory workshops: A sourcebook of 21 sets of ideas and activities*. London: Earthscan.

Chataway, C. (1997). An examination of the constraints on mutual inquiry in a participatory action research project. *Journal of Social Issues, 53*(4), 747–765.

Chawla, L. (2001). Evaluating children's participation: Seeking areas of consensus. *PLA Notes, 42*, 1–13.

Choudry, U. K., Jandu, S., Mahal, J., Sing, R., Sohi-Pabla, H., & Mutta, B. (2002). Health promotion and participatory action research with South Asian women. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship, 3*(1), 75–82.

Collie, P. (2007). *No straight lines or tidy boxes: Young Assyrian women negotiating identities and educational pathways in New Zealand*. Unpublished Masters Thesis. Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington.

Collie, P., Kindon, S., Liu, J., & Podsiadlowski, A. (in press). Mindful Identity Negotiations: The Acculturation of Young Assyrian Women in New Zealand. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?_ob=ArticleURL&_udi=B6V7R-4X7FRNK-1&_user=10&_rdoc=1&_fmt =&_orig=search&_sort=d&_docanchor=&view=c&_searchStrId=1133443844&_rerunOrigin=google&_acct=C000050221&_version=1&_urlVersion=0&_userid =10&md5=62376fb5a768b7acdf9ec65fc2413363.

Part 5: Children's participation in situations of crisis. (1998). Coomaraswamy, P., Dejanovic, V., Pridmore, P., Johnson, V., Ivan-Smith, E., Gordon, G., Pridmore, P., & Scott, P. (Eds.). *Stepping forward: Children and young people's participation in the development process* (pp. 157–172). London: Intermediate Technology Publications.

Darbyshire, P., MacDougall, C., & Schiller, W. S. (2005). Multiple methods in qualitative research with children: more insight or just more? *Qualitative Research, 2*(4), 417–436.

Friedman, M. (2006). *Trying hard is not good enough*. Victoria: Trafford Publishing.

Gow, G., Isaac, A., Gorgees, P., Babakhan, M., & Daawod, K. (2005). *Assyrian community capacity building in Fairfield city*. Sydney: Centre for Cultural Research, University of Western Sydney. Retrieved February 20, 2007 on the World Wide Web: http://assyrianrc.com/Downloads/2005ACCBreport.pdf.

Gustavsen, B. (2001). Theory and practice: The mediating discourse. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice* (pp. 17–26). London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences, comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations*. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications.

Isenberg, D. H., Loomis, C., Humphreys, K., & Maton, K. I. (2004). Self-help research: Issues of power sharing. In L. A. Jason, C. B. Keys, Y. Suarez-Balcazar, R. R. Taylor, & M. I. Davis (Eds.), *Participatory community research: Theories and methods in action* (pp. 123–137). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Ivan-Smith, E., & Johnson, V. (1998). The way forward. In V. Johnson, E. Ivan-Smith, G. Gordon, P. Pridmore, & P. Schott (Eds.), *Stepping forward: Children and young people's participation in the development process* (pp. 291–299). London: Intermediate Technology Publications Ltd.

Jupp, E. (2007). Participation, local knowledge and empowerment: Researching public space with young people. *Environment and Planning A, 39*(12), 2832–2844.

Kagitcibasi, C. (1970). Social norms and authoritarianism: A Turkish-American comparison. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 16*, 444–451.

Kagitcibasi, C. (1997). Individualism and collectivism. In Berry, J. W., Segall, M. H., & Kagitcibasi, C. (Eds.), *Handbook of cross-cultural psychology*. vol. 3 (pp.1–49). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Kagitcibasi, C. (2003). Autonomy, embeddedness and adaptability in immigration contexts. *Human Development, 46*(2–3), 145–150.

Kagitcibasi, C. (2005). Autonomy and relatedness in cultural context. Implications for self and family. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 36*(4), 403–422.

Kagitcibasi, C. (2007). *Family, self and human development across cultures: Theory and applications* (revised 2nd ed.). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Kegler, M. C., Young, K. H., Marshall, L. D., Bui, D., & Rodine, S. (2005). Positive youth development linked with prevention in a Vietnamese American community: Successes, challenges, and lessons learned. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 37*(3 Suppl. 1), 69–79.

Keough, N. (1998). 'Participatory development principles and practice: Reflections of a western development worker'. *Community Development Journal, 33*(3), 187–196.

Kesby, M. (2000). Participatory diagramming: Deploying qualitative methods through an action research epistemology. *Area, 32*(4), 423–435.

Keys, C. B., McMahon, S., Sanchez, B., London, L., & Abdul-Adil, J. (2004). Culturally anchored research: Quandaries, guidelines, and exemplars for community psychology. In L. A. Jason, C. B. Keys, Y. Suarez-Balcazar, R. R. Taylor, & M. I. Davis (Eds.), *Participatory community research: Theories and methods in action* (pp. 177–198). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Kindon, S. (2005). Participatory action research. In I. Hay (Ed.), *Qualitative research methods in human geography* (pp. 207–220). Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Kindon, S., Pain, R., & Kesby, M. (Eds.). (2007). *Participatory action research approaches and methods: Connecting people*. London: Participation and Place Routledge.

Lin, K. M. (1986). Pscyhopathology and social disruption in refugees. In C. L. Williams & J. Westermeyer (Eds.), *Refugee mental health in resettlement countries* (pp. 61–71). Hemisphere: Washington, DC.

Liu, J. H., Sik-hung Ng, M., Gastardo-Conaco, C., & Wong, D. S. W. (2008). Action research: A missing component in the emergence of social and cross-cultural psychology as a fully inter-connected global enterprise. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 2*(3), 1162–1181.

Mohatt, G. V., Kelly, L., Allen, J., Stachelrodt, M., Hensel, C., & Fath, R. (2004). Unheard Alaska: Culturally anchored participatory action research on sobriety with Alaska natives. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 33*(3/4), 263–273.

Nieuwenhuys, O. (2004). Participatory action research in the majority world. In S. Fraser, V. Lewis, S. Ding, M. Kellett, & C. Robinson (Eds.), *Doing research with children and young people* (pp. 206–221). London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Pain, R. (2004). Social geography: Participatory research. *Progress in Human Geography, 28*(5), 652–663.

Pridmore, P. (1998). Appendix 2: Ladders of participation. In V. Johnson, E. Ivan-Smith, G. Gordon, P. Pridmore, & P. Scott (Eds.), *Stepping forward: Children and young people's participation in the development process* (pp. 308–309). London: Intermediate Technology Publications.

Rew, A., & Rew, M. (2003). Development models 'out-of-place': Social research on methods to improve livelihoods in eastern India. *Community Development Journal, 38*(3), 213–224.

Schapiro, A. (1988). Adjustment and identity formation of Lao refugee adolescents. *Smith College Studies in Social Work, 58*(3), 157–181.

Schwartz, S. H. (1999). A theory of cultural values and some implications for work. *Applied Psychology: An International Review, 48*(1), 23–47.

Simpson, L., Wood, L., & Daws, L. (2003). Community capacity building: Starting with people not projects. *Community Development Journal, 38*(4), 277–286.

Statistics New Zealand. (2007). *2006 census of populations and dwellings: Ethnic groups.* Wellington: Statistics New Zealand. Retrieved June 10, 2007 from the World Wide Web: http://www.stats.govt.nz/NR/rdonlyres/F1A5AEF5-198F-4F42-8B86-51419FBA82E3/18595/2006CensusQSCI.xls.

Strack, R. W., Magill, C., & McDonagh, K. (2004). Engaging youth through photovoice. *Health Promotion Practice, 5*(1), 49–58.

Swantz, M. L. (2003). My road to participatory action research. In A. Cornwall & G. Pratt (Eds.), *Pathways to participation* (pp. 196–202). London: ITDG Publishing.

The Next. (2003). Working effectively with young people: A guide to youth participation. Retrieved July 28, 2005 from the World Wide Web. http://www.thenext.org.nz/documents/youthparticipationpolicy_001.pdf.

Westby, C., & Hwa-Froclich, D. (2003). Considerations in participatory action research when working cross-culturally. *Folia Phoniatrica et Logopaedica, 55*(6), 300–305.

Williams, L. (2004). Culture and community development: Towards new conceptualizations and practice. *Community Development Journal, 39*(4), 345–359.

Zhou, M. (1997). Segmented assimilation: Issues, controversies, and recent research on the new second generation. *The International Migration Review, 31*(4), 109–975.