Engaging with Difference: Soul-searching for a methodology in disability and development research

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INTRODUCTION

Disability is about much more than disability. Outsiders don't know this. Most people not directly concerned with disability issues still see it as a "marginal", "specialist" issue, slightly boring, and certainly not with any major contributions to make to the big bold issues of development, research or social exclusion. The opposite is true; the potential contribution is immense.

Whether considering discrimination, development, inclusion, or research, addressing disability brings out the polarities, the extreme challenges, the range of diversity, and provides the opportunity to get to the essence of the problem. I found this to be particularly true in relation to research. Anyone who begins to read about research methodology is quickly aware of the complexity of issues and the paradoxes within all research paradigms. Researching across cultures adds to these dilemmas; and a focus on disability enlarges and illuminates them, sometimes to dazzling degree.

In this chapter, I will share with you a life-changing personal experience of research, which I carried out with colleagues in Lesotho a few years ago. Many of the challenges and questions which arose are not specific to disability or development research, but it was precisely because the focus was disability and development that the issues emerged so large and luminous. This forces a more rigorous engagement with these issues, which has the potential to lead to deeper insight, personal transformation and research that is more emancipatory than exploitative.

For those wanting more detailed information about this research, the fully referenced academic version (Stubbs 1995) is available on the EENET web site or from the Save the Children (UK) Resource Unit.

BACKGROUND

My research sprang from my work as Global Disability Advisor for Save the Children UK. Part of my job was to "lead the process of policy development" in relation to disability, including issues around the education of disabled children. I was clear that this policy should be developed from the ground upwards - through our staff and partners in the 60 countries where we worked. But I felt daily and grossly inadequate for this task. This is a healthy feeling, provided it is balanced by determination to take on the challenge with integrity. I wanted the resulting policy and strategy to reflect real situations and real issues on the ground, whatever that meant. So, when the chance to take part in a flexible, research-based Masters Degree course at Cambridge arose, with a tutor who was asking similar questions, it seemed the ideal way forward.

My choice of topic - a Save the Children supported national programme on Inclusive Education in Lesotho, Southern Africa - was determined by a combination of principles, preference and pragmatics. I had visited the country twice before, and had established that our staff and partners would welcome the research. The programme itself was pioneering and potentially had much to teach others embarking on similar journeys. I wanted to learn from this programme.

The research topic was located in the broader area of the education of disabled children in countries of the South. (I use the terms North and South to refer to the broad division of countries in relation to resources and power). In my travels, I had been inspired by examples of integrated and inclusive education in the poorest countries with the fewest resources. Many seemed to be much nearer the ideals of inclusion than the so called "model programmes" of the North. Yet all the writing, research, discussion, experience-sharing was based on examples from the North. Worse still, these examples and ideas were being exported to the South, transplanted into alien cultures and contexts, frequently propped up by funding from the North (which did not last forever), and totally unaffordable in the local context.

The topic of Inclusive Education however, is not the focus of this chapter. My focus is research methodology. By this I do not mean "methods" of data collection. There is too frequently confusion between these two terms (methodology and methods) which, to me, are wholly different concepts. If I compare the research experience to an archaeological expedition, then the methods will only be the spades and technical tools used to dig up the

treasures. The methodology, however, includes all the planning, the values and reasons behind the journey, the choice of companions, the choice of transport to get there, the decisions on which way to go to get there, the etiquette and behaviours agreed between colleagues during the dig. It includes the responses to objects uncovered, the decisions on what to do with them, who owns them, who should keep them, how they should be kept, and where and when; and the analysis of the importance and value of the objects at the end of the expedition.

SEARCHLIGHT ON LITERATURE

As the "literature search" is a standard requirement of formal research, and is so rarely critiqued as a methodology in its own right, my chapter will begin with this focus.

I had wondered whether I could avoid what seemed to me to be the inevitable characteristics of literature searches (often rambling, descriptive and uninformative; sometimes fastidious and gleeful digs at irrelevant details in other people's writings). Contrary to my expectations, the exercise of searching the literature was an extremely provocative experience. It placed crucial issues on the methodological agenda and provided me with a set of criteria by which to create my own research literature.

I wanted to discover what other people had written on the broad topic of the education of disabled children in "the South", and what it really had to teach me. I already knew that a literature covering three quarters of the world would be impossible to validate - how could I have any idea whether the one article on education in Mali would be complete fantasy or a careful and authentic critique? Accordingly, I felt that I had to look at what lay beyond the descriptions. What processes of reflection were the authors engaging in? What were their starting points? What beliefs and values lay at the heart of their investigations? What purposes and aims lay ahead of them?

My starting questions were:

- What does the literature contribute to our knowledge about the education of disabled children in countries of the South, particularly in Africa?
- In what ways does it present information or insights which will contribute towards the development of relevant, effective, sustainable, appropriate policy and practice?

Has Literature Anything To Do With Authentic Knowledge?

A key issue was the role and status of literature in relation to knowledge. During my introduction to research protocol, the basic question of whether or not literature is the best way of accessing valid and reliable knowledge was never raised. It was not even perceived to be a question. The issues giving rise to my own questioning were:

- Lack of reference to indigenous knowledge: Within the different cultures and contexts of the South, there is a huge amount of knowledge and experience relating to the education of disabled children. This exists primarily within children, parents, family and community members, teachers, education, social and health sector personnel, and local researchers. Is this knowledge reflected in the literature?
- Alternative methods of knowledge storing/communicating: There are many culturally diverse approaches to accessing, storing and communicating knowledge, which are more common than writing (e.g. oral history, visual records, drama, storytelling). Many of these cultures are predominantly oral cultures
- Accessibility of Local Knowledge: Even when local knowledge is written down (within local programmes or by local researchers), these reports and articles are often not accessible to anyone who cannot literally go and physically find them on the shelves, nor to those who do not read the written language used in the report.
- Power inequalities: The power in global research, including agendas and resources, is firmly located in the North. In disability research, this power is largely held by non-disabled researchers and agencies. None is in the hands of children themselves.

Once I began to track down relevant literature, the importance of my question was confirmed. I found about 180 publications (very few given the broad scope of the topic). Most were written by writers from the North. Less than one third were obviously written by writers from the South, and these were usually the articles most difficult to find. Only 5 authors were writing from their perspective as disabled people. There was only one publication which represented the views of disabled and non-disabled children, but that was based in the UK. This simple start alerted me to the danger of assuming that the content of this literature would offer insight into the actual situation of disabled children's education. It also raised further concerns.

- Southern authors dancing to the tune of Northern academics: Many authors from the South were writing within the Northern academic style, and many had been funded by or based in Northern academic institutions.
- Building towers on quicksand: There was a tendency for the same small number of Northern academic writers to be cited in all writings, with no critical examination of the facts and perceptions originally presented. These authors were assumed to have laid solid foundations on which to build a literature.
- Validating personal experience: There is no basis to assume that a report or piece of research that is well-referenced is any more reliable or valid than one that is written purely on the basis of personal experience. In fact, the articles I found which drew directly, confidently and critically on personal experience were by far the most informative and inspiring.

These criticisms might hold for any literature, but they are exacerbated in relation to topics which span a wide range of contexts, cultures and circumstances which might be unfamiliar to the writers; and when there are few peer reviewers with sufficient knowledge and experience to offer criticism. Beware!

10 Questions for a Literature Search on Disability and Development

There are several key questions that it would be wise to ask when searching or producing literature on disability and development. For a fuller discussion, backed by lots of references (!), please refer to my Critical Review (Stubbs, 1994).

1. Are the facts and "hard" data reliable and can they be trusted?
   (I came across 3 totally different statistics on numbers of disabled children in one area, all written in articles published in the same year.)
2. Are the facts really facts?
   (Disability statistics are a good example, since definitions depend on cultural and contextual perceptions of people with impairments.)
3. Are key concepts examined critically?
   (I found that concepts like "special needs" and "disability" were seldom defined, or that Northern definitions were used, without criticism.)
4. Are concepts considered from a cross-cultural perspective?
   (I found an assumption that key concepts had a universal meaning and were culturally immune, e.g. "education", "childhood".)
5. Had key concepts been uncritically exported from the North to other

cultures?

(Exportation was also selective and piecemeal. Concepts became more rigid and reified once exported. Concepts discredited in the North were still used as a basis for practice in the South, e.g. IQ testing.)

6. Are the perspectives of key stakeholders represented?
(In relation to this topic, stakeholders would be disabled children, disabled adults, parents, local teachers and community members. Generally, their views were not represented - nor was this even perceived to be problematic.)

7. If the writers are "outsiders", are they self-critical and reflexive?
(Researching beyond one's direct experience is difficult. Where a writer is a non-disabled adult from the North, writing about disabled children in the South, then there needs to be awareness of the issues this raises, and - at the very least - an attempt to engage with these issues and be reflexive. This was rarely the case.)

8. Is the issue of ownership, participation in and control of research addressed?
(Disabled writers have argued that research which does not involve disabled people makes no contribution to disabled people's lives. The same arguments have been made about research by the North on the South. Yet these critiques were not generally seen as an issue in the texts I found.)

9. Is local knowledge and practice acknowledged and drawn upon?
(I found an assumption that communities were not doing anything in relation to educating their disabled children. Some writers challenged this, with compelling evidence that communities and teachers have been supporting disabled learners in creative ways for years.)

10.   Is there a discussion of power and resources in relation to global development?
(Global power and resource inequalities, agencies such as the World Bank or our own government aid departments, are all relevant to poverty, political control and resource allocation, which in turn are relevant to disability and development. Yet I found a tendency to portray the South as lacking political will, full of disease, poverty and victims - with little discussion on the underlying causes or systems which perpetuate injustice and inequality...including in academia.)

No writing is ever going to be totally without flaws - and many of those who have written in this area have proven to be excellent practitioners and facilitators for social change. But for me the key issue remains whether a literature produces

useable knowledge that firstly, can limit the damage that outside interventions can do and secondly, that leads to more effective, rights-based, sustainable, culturally appropriate, participatory development. Therefore it is important that constructive alternatives to the existing literature and research are proposed and implemented. This is what I tried to do. The critical literature search had provided me with clear criteria to inform my own research, and by which I would have to judge myself

A DIFFERENT JOURNEY: PREPARING IT

In my research, I wanted to facilitate a valid, ethical, useful enquiry in the context of different cultures and languages, acknowledge different power relationships, reconcile different agendas, and use approaches which would be empowering for a wide range of very different people. The stipulations I set for my research were that it should:

1. Directly benefit the programme - and not at some vague point in the future.
2. Provide lessons for policy and practice at a wider level (linked to my job).
3. Meet academic criteria (linked to the Masters Degree I was taking).
4. Result in personal and professional development - especially how to engage with "difference" as an outsider and a Western non-disabled professional).

The tension between these four stipulations permeated the research, and contributed greatly to the resulting richness of insight which I was privileged to gain.

Trawling the Methodology Guidebooks

Planning the research journey became a research journey in its own right. Publications on research methodology are extensive, but none reflected the particular situation I was in. However I found helpful ideas in several bodies of literature, including new paradigm research, qualitative research, reflective practitioner research, participatory research, disability research, feminist research, case study research (to a lesser degree), and development research. This last group was the most helpful to my situation (but refer to Stubbs 1995 for more detail on what I learnt from other approaches).

Robert Chambers pioneered the broad and rapidly growing range of

approaches known as PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) or PLA (Participatory Learning Approaches). Slim and Thomson raise key issues around doing research in oral cultures. The PRA approaches are often trivialized for advocating deceptively simple methods which can be used with non-literate communities. However, such criticisms confuse mere methods with the broader philosophical and ethical issues raised in the methodology. It was the methodology of PRA that I found useful and relevant.

PRA proposes a methodology which builds on the notion that local people are capable of sharing, enhancing and analysing their own knowledge in order to plan, act and promote their own development. It contains a moral and practical imperative for local people to analyse their own problems and implement their own solutions. It suggests a new role for outsider agencies from the North (donors or implementers) who support project work in countries of the South: a role of facilitation. PRA offers a relatively quick, effective and ethical way of doing appraisals and evaluations. Power relations and participation issues are addressed; a balance between precision and pragmatics is proposed in concepts such as "optimal ignorance" (not knowing what is not worth knowing) and "appropriate imprecision" (not measuring more than is really needed).

Preparing Oneself, Not Planning For Others

Preparation is the key - rather than planning. This may seem trivial, but I found it was an immensely practical concept. For me it meant that I could work on my values, my beliefs, my standards and parameters of behaviour, and I could develop a kit bag of tools (methods) which I might or might not use "in the field". What I could not do, sitting thousands of miles away from the location of my research project, was really plan. Moreover, I wanted the research team in Lesotho to plan the research together.

This was not an easy decision to stick to, when my colleagues in Britain were developing their questionnaires and making detailed plans. To add to my fears, I knew I would soon be far away from my tutor and my literature, with only one chance to "get it right". I had hoped to do some long-distance planning with the team, but this did not happen - primarily because the team in Lesotho had more pressing priorities and it would only be when I was on their doorstep that they would be able to give some time to the research.

LIVING IT: THE JOURNEY IN PROCESS

I will share with you an entry from my research diary soon after I landed in Lesotho:

> Monday, 13th February: I'm in Lesotho, jet-lagged and sweaty and L came to welcome me in my very own cool rondalla which will be my home for the next month. She came straight to the point, and warned me what I had let myself in for; everything takes a huge amount of organisation, plans don't always work, the Ministry wanted to know what it's all about, if it rains it will be very difficult in the mountains, the LNFOD representative (disabled person team member) got a job two days ago and is now unavailable, the Ministry has appointed a new Sp Ed team member but he has only just started work, another team member has to go for physiotherapy everyday and so cannot come on the field trips...

Even the bits I had been sure about had crumbled; the Ministry had been informed and agreed the research, but were now having second thoughts, and how about my beautifully balanced research team? I was plunged into the swirling waters of collaboration.

A research team does not make the research task any easier - but it is, I believe, absolutely vital when researching grassroots issues, designed to feed into grassroots actions, and outside one's own culture and experience. Important issues to take on board in setting up a research team are:

- All the key stakeholders should be involved in planning, implementing and analysing the research.
- The diversity within the particular context should be reflected in the team members (e.g. gender, disability, outsiders and insiders, cultural and linguistic backgrounds).
- Team members should have a representative role, not a tokenistic one. It is surprising how often a disabled person is involved but with no representative remit, and, even worse, insufficient self-empowerment to participate on an equal basis.
- Power differences must be recognised and managed. This has implications for chairing the team and for the behaviours and roles of the team's powerholders.
- A commonly agreed goal is essential, and can be a raft to hold onto when

the sea of difference gets choppy.

In our research team, we found a new member of the Lesotho Disabled People's Organisation to join us and established a team of 6 people, reflecting a balance of gender, disability, outsiders and insiders, culture and linguistic backgrounds (Basotho, Zimbabwean and British). All team members wanted to improve policy and practice in relation to the educational inclusion of disabled children in Lesotho.

Mutual Ownership or My Agenda

At the first meeting of the team, it was clear that although my colleagues had welcomed the research and agreed to be involved, much more needed to be done to establish real joint ownership. One key lesson I learnt was that ownership is not developed just by telling people on Day One that this research belongs to them. Rather, developing ownership by others in the team demands giving up some of your own ownership, and an on-going commitment to shared ownership at all levels.

The PRA literature was useful here. It gave me simple sheets for planning which I could photocopy and hand out to my research team. This may seem a trivial point - but it was a way of handing over the "power" of research methodology to team members. They had access to what I had access to; methodology was demystified.

As a team, we developed a list of key research questions, topics, sub-topics and methods of data-collection. We tried to identify our own assumptions and bias. We had already decided to focus on two pilot Inclusive Education schools; one perceived as responding positively, and one which appeared to be responding negatively. All team members listed criteria which defined the terms "positive" and "negative". The schools were identified by Ministry of Special Education members of the team, who had overall responsibility for the pilot programme. This promoted more ownership, as it linked directly into their professional work. Assigning tasks to pairs within the team also promoted ownership, and brought out more in-depth perceptions and information than was revealed in meetings of the whole team.

It was also good to compile a matrix of relevant knowledge, skills and experience which different team members had between them. This brought together such diverse areas as knowledge of local language/community,

knowledge of the families, ability to relate well to children, observation skills, listening skills, drawing/writing skills, story-telling skills, role play skills, report writing, organisational skills and leadership. The table demonstrated that each team member had a range of different contributions to make. We included local community members in this matrix, in anticipation of their involvement.

You WILL Be Participatory!

I had strong opinions about what sort of approaches I wanted to use. Extracting sensitive information from vulnerable people at gun-point was not one of them. However, some team members had been exposed to Northern ideas about interviews and questionnaires, and methods for extracting information which were far from participatory or empowering. I began to realise that we all needed to spend some time learning and experimenting with different types of participatory methods.

Behind this was the more fundamental issue of who the research was for and what our roles were. As a team, we were still all "outsiders" in relation to the real primary stakeholders who were: firstly, disabled and non-disabled children; secondly, their parents and families; thirdly, the classroom teachers; and fourthly, community members. I initiated a discussion on action research and our potential role as research facilitators rather than extractors of information.

The term "community participation" will make anyone in the development field cringe out of over-exposure and accumulated cynicism - and rightly so. These concepts need to be taken apart and turned into practical approaches. In my situation, there were very many communities at different levels all interacting in different ways and with different agendas. We had established our own community in the research team, with a reasonable degree of mutual understanding and ownership. We were now going to visit a remote rural community consisting of different groups of people all with different perceptions and agendas. Fortunately, the schools were signed up members of a long-term pilot project, and monitoring and evaluation was an integral part of this process. It would have been inappropriate to try to involve a school not part of any longer term project. Also, some of the team members knew the teachers and had established a good rapport already.

As the time for field work drew near, despite the progress made, my anxiety rose:

Thursday, February 16th: I am concerned that the visit to the school will be nothing more than a series of predicable interviews on passive groups of people trying to do what is expected of them...am I as usual, being overambitious?...I feel confused about the objectives of the research; is it me gaining insights?, gaining lots of "evidence" for "them out there"?, transferring skills to the team? rehearsing the evaluation? improving the programme? helping the Sp Ed team to learn about their impact?, are these compatible?...I am currently placing more emphasis on the collaboration and research process than research results...(Personal research diary).

Yet the team were bored with planning, and wanted to get started. Again, Chamber's encouragement to "start, stumble, and self-correct" was helpful. My natural inclination would have been to spend the next 6 months planning!

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

There were many rich insights gained during each day of the research process, but these can be read in the unedited version (Stubbs 1995). Instead, I want to share with you some insights about the nature of tools or methods used.

We wanted to start by finding out what the existing situation was in relation to inclusion. Classroom observation had been agreed as the "tool" to initiate this. Classroom teachers and the District Advisor would also take part in observing each other's classes. Following the observation, we had a group discussion which exceeded expectations. Teachers became very animated and engrossed in presenting their feedback and challenging each other. At this point I found I had to make what then seemed a choice between two of my research stipulations: the discussions were carried out partly in English but when they got going, they lapsed into Basotho. My "academic" stipulation implied that I should take detailed notes of all this wonderful data. But to "directly benefit the programme" required that I accept that teachers were gaining more from the discussions in their own language. I put the notepad aside.

I also began to get to grips with my role as a facilitator and supporter. Some of the feedback from the classroom observations was judgmental, based on interpretation. I could highlight the difference between describing a factual incident or sequence of events, and presenting a generalised judgement. The teacher who was being observed had the first opportunity to comment on the observation, then it became a free for all. A wide range of key issues relating to

inclusion were raised: is "behaviour" a disability? What does "lazy" mean? What are the best seating arrangements? How can teachers maintain discipline without disempowering children?

Another issue that emerged from research was the distinction between non-confrontational and confrontational tools - both of which can be used [in] participatory research. Non-confrontational tools are those methods which are taught to the primary stakeholders, who then use the tools themselves to learn about their own situation. They then present their finding to the research facilitator/team, and thereby engage in their own analysis. Non-confrontational methods include inviting people to:

- Compile their own table of successes and constraints in their work.
- Draw a programme profile, giving peaks and troughs and catalytic events.
- Draw mobility diagrams, maps or tables related to their work.
- Do small groupwork or work in pairs on analysing aspects of their work.

Some methods may involve direct engagement by the research facilitator or team, but are still not really inherently confrontational: facilitated storytelling; focus groups, with sensitive facilitation; and questionnaires.

Confrontational methods are those that require the research facilitator or team to engage directly with the person who holds the information or experience. Here, the agenda is set and controlled by the research facilitator. These tools include:

- Classroom observation (unless carried out by teachers alone).
- Structured and semi-structured interviews.

All of these approaches can be appropriate and successful in different contexts and cultures. I learnt that both confrontational and non-confrontational tools work well where the key stakeholders (the ones with the information/experience) had a high level of rapport and trust with the research facilitators, and where they themselves had a good level of empowerment and self-confidence. However, non-confrontational tools potentially work well in all situations - including where there is a low level of trust and self-confidence among key stakeholders. Confrontational tools had more limited usage: they did not work where there was not a good level or trust, or where the people concerned had low self-confidence and had significantly less power than the Research

Facilitator/team members. Also, confrontational tools might not work in cultures where there is a very formal system of inspection or judgement by those in authority - since participants might feel extremely threatened and cautious.

Confrontational tools depend on the inter-personal skills and experience of the research facilitator or team member. When we carried out semi-structured interviews or facilitated story-telling (basically sitting with a parent of a disabled child and inviting them to "tell the story" of their child from birth), there was a vast difference in the results depending on the approach of the facilitator. Some people made the parent feel at ease and heard a detailed and passionate account of their experience. Others expected the parent to respond formally to the list of prompts that the team had agreed, and basically asked them questions that resulted in stilted responses. With non-confrontational tools, the facilitator needs different skills again, to be able to explain and demonstrate a method very clearly.

As always, the key is not seeing any of these tools as inherently right or appropriate without modification. Rather, any and all of them may, or may not, be the best tools in a certain situation. So, in a subsequent evaluation in China, it was deemed appropriate to use more traditional methods with government officials who would have been offended if asked to get down on the ground and draw pictures; whereas kindergarten teachers welcomed methods which were more interactive.

ENGAGING WITH DIFFERENCE

As a team, we encountered cultural differences. For example: I asked the team to meet every evening to review the day and plan the next. Some felt this was a bit over the top. We had different understandings of the term "thoroughness", which seemed to be both a cultural and a personality issue. I was the stereotypical western perfectionist, obsessed with writing it all down, doing it quickly, and staying in control. My Southern African colleagues displayed a greater degree of tolerance, a preference for face-to-face communication, plenty of pragmatism, a greater ease with the "unexpected", a totally different sense of time, and a lot of patience. What was exciting about our team was the alchemy of bringing these two perspectives together. Thus, I felt I could contribute about the rigour of the process, but I tried to let go of my less necessary obsessions with detail and timing.

We also encountered the difference of disability.

The PRA tools had not been designed to be accessible to disabled people. Even so, providing the underlying philosophy was understood, it was not difficult to be creative with the basic ideas. Many of the practical tools used in PRA involve manipulating objects such as sticks, stones, dried beans, the earth to make maps, tables, graphs etc. This offers ways of involving people with visual impairment, and can facilitate the involvement of people with learning disability. For example, a group of children with a range of impairments compiled a daily profile of their life in different segments. All were able to draw a series of pictures and then talk about them, providing a wealth of information about their daily lives, and providing them with an opportunity to have the details of their lives heard and validated.

In Lesotho, our visually impaired team member and his "aural observation" in the classroom made a unique contribution: the rest of us were so dominated by the visual, that we missed much of the interactive dialogue between teacher/pupil, and pupil/pupil, let alone the tone of voice and dominance of difference speakers. He also facilitated the focus group discussions with children to discuss their perceptions on inclusion. As a disabled role model he had the authority to ask the sort of questions that would have been inappropriate for non-disabled people to ask. He was also a role model for the teachers, particularly in the school which was resistant to inclusion.

Working with a disabled team member or involving disabled children in research really highlights the issues around participation. It might be possible to get away with thinking that girl children are participating along with boy children, or that children from different cultures are all involved (there will often be children from oppressed groups who are very clever at learning what is expected and copying the mainstream norms). But when there is a deaf or blind child or team member, when a person uses a wheelchair, when there is a child with severe learning disability using an alternative form of communication, then the extent to which a situation is inclusive becomes very evident. Until the involvement of disabled people in community participatory research which does not have an overt disability focus becomes the norm, any so called participatory research will still be fundamentally exclusive.

REFLECTING: RESEARCH AS EXPLOITATION OR EMANCIPATION?

When I came to write up the research, I made a distinction between the collaborative analysis which was carried out by the team, during and after the

period of research in Lesotho, and my own personal retrospective analysis which happened back in the UK in the following months. The collaborative analysis reflected the views of the team, and I felt that it was extremely important to present this as it happened. It was not my business to tamper with it. This included the team's reflections on both the process and the resulting learning. When reading write-ups of participatory evaluations, I rarely find this distinction. The writer places their own interpretation on the research results irrespective of whether the participants have different perspectives. This is a very limited concept of participation. The analysis stage is frequently ignored, yet it is the most significant aspect of research and evaluation. Statistics and data do not speak for themselves: they will always have an underpinning philosophy and interpretation which may or may not be overt.

The advantage of being committed to write up this research in the UK meant that I was forced to carry on thinking in a systematic and critical manner long after I left Lesotho. This was incredibly valuable. Normally, after an experience of learning, we semi-consciously draw up a set of conclusions, which might include generalisations or stereotypical perceptions. The clarity of the insights and impact of the experience fades after time. However, putting one's reflections under the microscope can consolidate and clarify those insights, even produce new insights. It can create a depth of understanding which does actually transform one's values, beliefs and behaviour.

I would like to end this chapter by sharing some of those personal retrospective reflections. Most are not conclusions, but questions that need further exploration.

Inquisition or Quest Within?

We all have a tremendous capacity to embody contradictions within our beliefs and behaviours. Research can expose these contradictions, if we let it. I have long believed in participatory, yet I was totally unprepared for the way in which assumptions I did not even realise I held were dramatically challenged.

Questioning is a common and highly acceptable type of behaviour for people from the North. It is a trait which is actively encouraged in children, and applauded in students. In research, it is perceived as essential. Yet I often noticed that people in other cultures didn't really do it, except within the context of socially determined greetings and exchanges. In my Lesotho research, I began to ask questions myself about the values underpinning "questioning" and

the extractive nature of knowledge acquisition.

This became very apparent in our experiences at the second school which was perceived as not being so successful. The teachers had told parents to come to the school to meet us, and we carried out the same type of semi-structured interviews with these parents as we had in the first school. Even though those who were conducting the interviews were using their mother tongue and had explained the purpose of the visit, the parents were obviously disturbed, distrustful, and fearful. The difference was that in this situation, the parents rarely had contact with the school, they were not welcome at the school, and their "inferiority" was constantly reaffirmed in relation to the educated staff at the school. A short explanation by a group of strangers was not enough to enable them to understand and feel part of our research experience. So, here was a very extreme power imbalance, and questioning was a type of exploitation. But even in situations where there was willingness and trust (as in the first school), I felt uncomfortable with the methods that involved direct questioning.

Questioning other people about their lives, particularly where the questioners have more power or are not trusted friends or family members, is a process of extracting personal parts of themselves for our own use and gratification. This is in line with traditional western approaches to many aspects of life: extracting what we want from the environment, dominating over other cultures, rampant consumerism. Do we have any right to do this? Very few people in situations of less power are likely to refuse to be questioned, and so "consent" is a poor excuse.

I also feel that there is a big distinction between the approach to gaining knowledge which is based on acquisition, which can be called 'acquiry', and an approach which is basically a quest within oneself, engaging the spirit, heart and mind, which can be called 'enquiry'. For me, the initial impulse towards questioning others gave way to listening to others, sharing their experiences, engaging with them, and questing within myself. Research becomes a process of placing oneself in a situation, engaging with it, and reflecting on what happens within oneself. The job of research facilitator becomes one of supporting others to engage in the same process of self-critical reflection.

I notice now that my own way of accessing knowledge about different cultural situations has changed dramatically. When I visit India, I rarely ask questions when I find myself in a puzzling situation. Instead I stay with the experience, I wait, I listen, I observe, and later, I reflect. I find I learn a lot more this way.

I'm Only Here to Learn!

Another variation of this extractive process is the "I'm here to learn" approach which so many of us flying in from the North say in order to demonstrate our humility in the face of the real knowledge of the people on the ground. After several days of "learning" during the Lesotho research, I began to feel that I was not pulling my weight. Everyone around me was working very hard sharing their experience, giving information, analysing and problem solving. I was careful not to give my opinions or to collude with their expectations that I might be some sort of "expert" because I was from London. I soon realised that this is a false and in a sense hypocritical stance to take. We all have skills and knowledge, and I was denying my 20 plus years of freely received education and privileged exposure to a wide range of situations if I did not believe I had anything to offer. The more tricky approach was to offer what was appropriate to offer, and to develop a real exchange which did not in any way undervalue one type of contribution against another. In my case, I found the balance was well established after I presented some straightforward teaching sessions on different aspects of research methodology.

Oral Cultures are Wonderful! Just let me write that down...

Another main area of my learning relates to examining another aspect of the cultural underpinnings of research; research in cultures which are predominantly oral.

In my own research, I had reservations about the extent to which my own insistence on written records, and my encouragement to others to write their experiences down, constantly undermined oral culture. Even those from the North who try to validate oral testimony do this by writing about it. The research challenged my assumption that the function of memory is to recall "facts". Another possibility was that memory was a creative process which gave "insights into how people make sense of their lives and social worlds" (Slim and Thomson, 1993).

In an attempt to find alternative means of accessing, storing and communicating knowledge, many of our methods focused on oral testimony, story telling, drawings and non-literacy based activities. The presence of the team member who was blind helped considerably in heightening our awareness of the richness of aural observations. Ideally, if the research did not have to be written

up for an academic audience, it would have been more appropriate to present the conclusions in different media; drama, drawing, video, stories, songs etc.

Authors, Authority and Authenticity

It is no accident that the terms authority and authenticity come from the term "author". For me the notion of authorship became central. The primary authors of the experiences the research was addressing were the children, the teachers, parents, community members. It is to these authors that the research is primarily accountable. For me this presented a challenge in that I was intending to try to make this research accountable to an external audience many thousands of miles away with different notions of rigour. I had been unwilling to impose a Northern academic concept of rigour onto other participants in the research. Despite the vulnerability of staying with this process, not knowing what would emerge, by the end of the research my notions of what counts as "rigour" had changed considerably.

The rigour was the breadth and depth of self-critical awareness permeating the whole process. The authority of the research and its authenticity stems from acknowledging who the authors of the research are, and by letting their words, their perceptions, their analyses shine clearly through. This pragmatic rigour has its own validity.

From Capacity to Power, from Participation to Emancipation

The final key lesson I will share with you relates to the question, who can do research? My conclusion is that anyone who has some capacity to reflect on their own situation can be a researcher. This includes children with learning disabilities and people without literacy skills. I feel that a distinction needs to be made between "researchers" and the "research facilitator". Everyone involved in the research should be a researcher, and the job of the facilitator is to transfer research skills and enable people to become their own researchers.

Although everyone (maybe apart from some very severely mentally disabled people) has the capacity to do research, in situations of extreme poverty and oppression, people do not have the power. Oppressed groups include disabled people, children, women, and even with the opportunity to "participate", their participation will merely be the lubrication of someone else's research agenda unless they have the power to do so. The ultimate test of successful research is not the degree of participation, but the extent to which it leads to emancipation

(Swantz and Vainio-Mattila 1988, p. 131).

If you as research facilitator are serious about helping facilitate this, then be warned, you will have to allow your own research agenda to be transformed, you will have to lose control, but hold on tight to your self-critical perspective.

CONCLUSION - YOUR JOURNEY

I hope that this chapter has challenged your thinking about research. Don't believe what I have said, check it out in relation to your own experience and the unedited version of my thesis. If you don't agree, challenge my arguments and develop an alternative. Don't get stuck on details which do not make a difference to people's lives, this is a great academic distraction! Development is a continuum from the personal to the global; research can bring the two ends of this continuum together. Spend your time on finding better, more authentic, more integral, more rigorous approaches to research which result in greater social justice and emancipation for all.

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