December 2017

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The purpose of this article is to advance an understanding of a key philosophical underpinning that is necessary for projects to become authentically community-based, that is, an epistemology that is "participatory." This theory of knowledge has critical importance for realizing Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) in regions around the world. To demonstrate the significance of participatory epistemology in CBPR, this article examines and rethinks traditional CBPR approaches through a community-based lens, presents a critical understanding of the link between CBPR theory and practice, and offers a perspective to move beyond the typical theory-practice debate. The central message for future community-engaged scholars is that a particular epistemological stance sustains the entire CBPR operation. With this insight, they should be able to gauge accurately the progress of a project and act in concert with a community.

The participatory methods that are used in community-based participatory research (CBPR) to democratize investigative processes are well-documented (Hacker, 2013; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003). A prominent advocate of these strategies, and engaged scholar, was Colombian sociologist, Orlando Fals Borda. He noted almost twenty years ago that traditional institutions sometimes "'end up co-opting the concept of participation, and adopt it only in its most superficial form and formal expression'" (Gómez, 1999, p. 153). This paper supports Fals Borda's argument that continues to have current relevance and advances a deeper understanding of a key philosophical underpinning that is necessary for projects to become authentically community-based, that is, an epistemology that is "participatory" (Fals Borda, 1988). This theory of knowledge has critical importance for realizing community-engaged research in communities around the world.

To begin, a summary of the history and tenets of CBPR is presented. Subsequently, typical aspects of CBPR are examined critically, followed by an exploration of the link between CBPR theory and practice. Next, a new perspective on moving beyond the theory-practice debate is offered. And last, the importance of a participatory epistemology is emphasized for future CBPR projects to be thoroughly community-based.

Summary of the History and Tenets of CBPR

The origins of CBPR (Wallerstein & Duran, 2003) are often traced back to the German-American social psychologist, Kurt Lewin (1946), or to Fals Borda (1979a). Lewin's work is cited commonly by scholars conducting "action research" in organizational and educational settings (Gordon, 2008; McNiff & Whitehead, 2000). "Participatory action research," the type of investigation that is associated with Fals Borda, tends to be recognized in studies that are carried out in the Global South, specifically in Latin America (see Chovanec & González, 2009; Salazar, 1991). But communities in high-income nations have also benefited from this particular

approach (McFarlane & Hansen, 2007), which is known to be more politically motivated and social justice oriented (McIntrye, 2008).

The idea behind Lewin's approach is that social experiments could be designed in natural settings with the purpose to accomplish goals that are identified at the outset of the study. While he used traditional social scientific methods, his work shifted the perspective on how research could serve as a vehicle for achieving objectives in real-life situations (Greenwood & Levin, 1998). The capability of research to address social issues was promoted in Lewin's work and is now considered to be a hallmark of CBPR (Coughlin, Smith, & Fernández, 2017).

The original collaborative efforts of Fals Borda (1988), his research team, and peasants in Nicaragua, Mexico, and Colombia integrated collective inquiry, educational methods, and socio-political action in the pursuit of knowledge that could inform strategies to counter oppression. One of Fals Borda's multidisciplinary teams of intellectuals, La Rosca de Investigación y Acción Social (Circle of Research and Social Action), studied local cultural traditions and oral history with community members in order to use this information in grassroots social movements (Fals Borda, 1973, 1979b) such as in the effort to regain communal lands in Colombia that had been unlawfully taken by elites (Fals Borda, 1988). Participatory action research, as illustrated in this work, is intended to break down the status quo and create social change. These aims represent a key distinction from Lewin's type of action research.

The major tenets of CBPR have been explained in detail in several other works (e.g. Coughlin, Smith, & Fernández, 2017; Hacker, 2013; Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998). For the purposes of this paper, three tenets that relate clearly to the aforementioned history of CBPR (Wallerstein & Duran, 2003), and which are of particular importance to the present theme, will be highlighted. The first tenet is the average citizen is viewed to be helpful, rather than a hindrance, to a project. Recent CBPR studies continue to elevate the importance of the role of community members and their strengths (Ponder-Brookins et al., 2014), despite various challenges to integrate them into a project (Makhoul, Nakkash, Harpham, & Qutteina, 2013). In relation to this notion is the second tenet, which is the belief that community members and their goals should be at the forefront of the CBPR process (e.g., Jernigan, Jacob, the Tribal Community Research Team, & Styne, 2015). A CBPR approach thus takes into account community members' identification of problems and ideas for solutions, in order to promote a group's self-determination and empowerment (Coughlin et al., 2017). Engaging community members is believed to be a way for researchers to relinquish control to the group (Beeman-Cadwallader, Quigley, & Yazzie-Mintz, 2011), as well as inviting a community to form a "partnership" (Metzler et al., 2003). This need for community engagement coincides with the third and final tenet of present concern, which the belief that CBPR encourages the participation and close collaboration of a community in every facet of a project (Israel et al., 1998).

Matthew's (2017) study sought to fill a gap in CBPR literature by contributing a taxonomy of behaviors that would facilitate cooperative partnerships founded on equitable and trusting relationships between researchers and communities. Specifically, her research identified particular actions by researchers that were recalled in interviews with community members, service providers, and graduate students researchers. The interviews focused on the interactions with researchers during a community assessment. Although Matthew's (2017) sample size (18) was small and homogenous (highly-educated, White, non-Hispanic, female, graduate students), her "preliminary evidence" (p. 118) offers numerous practical pointers for researchers who are planning to engage in CBPR. For example, "get to know participants and project members more personally"(Mathew, 2017, p. 121) and "associate with or be accompanied by well-respected

46

community members" (Mathew, 2017, p. 121) are behaviors that she included in the category of "increasing community member comfort and willingness to participate" (p. 121). With regard to communication, Matthew (2017) identified twelve approaches such as "listen," "avoid entering the community with preconceived notions," and "make clear, in simple language, what you want and why you are doing research" (p. 123). On the surface, nothing is wrong with these strategies. But even with these behaviors enacted, a community-engaged approach may continue to marginalize individuals. Therefore, in addition to using these technical guidelines, the proper philosophical underpinnings must serve as the organizational foundation of a project.

Examining Aspects of CBPR

Based on the ontological view that persons are capable of making changes in their lives, given their reflections and creativity (Kindon, Pain, & Kesby, 2007), praxis (Fals Borda, 1979a) is incorporated in participatory research. The assumption is that the community members should be in charge of the pursuit of change in their own lives. In general, the action-reflection process calls for participants to serve as co-researchers (McIntrye, 2008) in the following research phases: (a) identify issues, (b) develop strategies, (c) implement plans, (d) observe activities, and (e) assess the outcomes (McTaggart, 1991). This procedure is described typically as "cyclical" or "recursive," because persons are engaged in dialogue that stimulates new questions and alternative ideas for plans (McIntyre, 2008).

The initial role of the researcher is to coordinate investigative activities, encourage participation, and facilitate dialogue (Kindon et al., 2007; McIntrye, 2008). Additionally, this person is responsible for supporting a collective learning process that is built on reflection (Mhina, 2009). However, because participation is open, other participant-researchers may take on these duties. In fact, community members who are interested in such tasks should have the opportunity to gain the skills that are required to fulfill these needs. After all, a goal of community-based research is that participants learn participatory methods so that they can continue to use these strategies in the absence of a professional researcher (Fals Borda, 1988). The tradition of relying solely on professionals is thus inappropriate for this approach because community members are believed to give significant guidance to (McIntyre, 2008) and change their communities (Kindon et al., 2007). Moreover, a community has the insight and skills, derived from daily experience, necessary to understand local issues and solve most problems (Fals Borda, 1988). As a result, community involvement is emphasized in these initiatives (Sullivan et al., 2003).

A problem arises, however, when projects are assumed to be community-based merely because community members are included. For example, the support of an executive board that consists of members of the community is not an adequate justification that a project is community-based. The reason is that this element of inclusivity, although valued within a grassroots framework (Williams, 1991), does not guarantee that the interests of a community will be taken seriously. Furthermore, according to a community-based perspective, the participation of community members should be central, instead of complementary, in order to address successfully local concerns (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2005).

A similar issue follows from the belief that increasing the input of group members will result automatically in a community-based project. Certainly, the views of a community are essential. But there is more to promoting the democratic conditions required for a participatory project (Stringer, 1996) than merely allowing the voice of a community to be heard.

What is necessary is a dialogue that entails reflection (Buber, 1970), so that personal perspectives do not hinder the possibility for all views to receive equal consideration and be understood. According to the philosopher, Martin Buber (1970), dialogue occurs when individuals establish themselves in an intersubjective relationship, are fully attentive to one another, and strive for mutual understanding. Researchers who do not develop projects from a community-based perspective, however, will not likely encourage real dialogue between all involved in a project. Moreover, they may fail to perceive how various attempts to collaborate with a community may actually restrict possibilities for planning.

At the core of participatory inquiry is the epistemological shift away from an emphasis on obtaining objective facts. Instead, knowledge is always viewed as being mediated by human interpretation and interaction (Blumer, 1969). For this reason, qualitative methods, such as storytelling, community art, and photovoice (Kindon et al., 2007) that rely on personal experience are popular methods.

Nevertheless, interviews, focus groups, and other traditional methods are often employed (McIntrye, 2008). Yet, the participation that is emphasized from a community-based perspective facilitates a different way of understanding the use of such methods. Specifically, participation that is predicated on a subject-subject relationship, as opposed to the subject-object dichotomy, means that participants do not depend on the professional researcher to design the study, collect data, and reveal objective "findings." Rather, participants are thoroughly engaged throughout the research process and decide how to verify the information. Collective decisions thus attribute meaning and importance to information that is discovered, and thereby knowledge is created that is viewed as factual to the group and deemed useful by consensus (Fals Borda, 1988; Rahman, 1991).

The significance of participation, therefore, requires conventional procedures to be re-examined. For example, because participants are believed to provide valuable, culturally-rooted knowledge, questions that they generate for a survey will likely be relevant and comprehensible to their community. In effect, standard survey pretesting that is conducted to ensure that a research design will fulfill its purpose (Singleton & Straits, 2010) may be less important with respect to other elements of the protocol than traditionally considered. With respect to qualitative methods, themes that emerge from common coding techniques should be held suspect if there is no attempt to understand how participation connects to this information and, even more so, if participants were not involved in the analytic process (Murphy & Schlaerth, 2014).

Typically, participation is recognized as a methodological concern that can be addressed by strategies intended to promote inclusion and equity such as those that are within Matthew's (2017) taxonomy of behaviors. In other words, studies usually identify how participants were, or were not, involved in the various stages of the research (e.g., Adelman, 1997). After all, without the criteria of participation, the research would lose authenticity.

Although there are well-developed critiques of participation (Arieli, Friedman, & Agbaria, 2009; Ospina et al., 2004), this paper advances an understanding of why CBPR researchers should first consider participation to be a guiding philosophical element of an initiative, particularly in terms of epistemology. When researchers base their efforts on participatory epistemology, they assert the need to conceive that community engagement is the site where "local knowledge" (Fals Borda, 1988) is discovered and provides the source of viable solutions. All methodological choices are then informed by this notion.

CBPR Theory and Practice

A common concern of participatory researchers is "trying to secure acceptance and legitimacy for indigenous ways of knowing, viewing, and experiencing the social world" (Kapoor & Jordan, 2009, p. 7). For projects that seek to use a local knowledge base to carry out the vision of a community in collaboration with its members, Community-based participatory research (CBPR) can be a fruitful approach (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2005). The point is to work with communities to solve real problems and produce concrete outcomes (Stoecker, 2005). Plans are thus made, implemented, and assessed collectively. Therefore, efforts go beyond merely identifying and understanding issues.

For example, Case et al. (2014) present a CBPR project that involved the research training of four individuals, who were consumers of services offered by the Connecticut Mental Health Center, so that they would have the capacity to carry out focus group research on consumer experience with two academic researchers. This team facilitated 14 focus groups, analyzed the data, and presented the findings to various stakeholders. The CBPR project resulted in increased participation of consumers in the center, an organizational effort to foster a culture of respect, greater interest in consumer input, and the remodeling of the center's space to promote a more hospitable and warm environment. The CBPR team continued to work on research together for several years after the initial project.

CPBR is thus an applied approach that intends to address relevant community concerns (Stanton, 2014). Simply put, this affair is practical. When the focus is on workable plans and achievable objectives, however, theory can be lost or overlooked. As a result, the range of possibilities for a project is narrowed, while the various opportunities to fulfill goals are less likely to be recognized and seized. Moreover, researchers may base decisions on whatever appears to be feasible at the present moment rather than on community-based principles. Such a pragmatic style for working with communities, especially without consideration for the necessary philosophy, does not provide members with sufficient support to realize completely their plans.

Therefore, the message is that the philosophy at the root of a true community-based project should not be overlooked, that is, the anti-dualism that is assumed by participation (Murphy and Schlaerth, 2015). Not even the best of intentions, logistically sound proposals or efficient organizational efforts are an adequate substitute for this orientation. Although the level of participation in a project may be increased with good methodology, not even the most solid strategies can insure that members will be self-directed and their participation will be meaningful.

For example, in CBPR, community members are encouraged to partake in planning in ways that are usually reserved for experts and professionals. Underlying this approach is the belief that the perspectives of a community matter significantly for a project to succeed (Gómez & Sordé Marti, 2012). And via the participation of community members, this insight can be shared. But when the participation of a community is viewed simply to be a means for obtaining information, members can easily be dehumanized, and the knowledge they share can be treated as an instrumental thing. Without reflexive mindfulness, that is, intentional and careful attentiveness to one's own perspective and those of others, these outcomes may be the product of approaches that are designed to avoid such results.

Along these lines, in the case of a qualitative interview, researchers may "probe" a participant for data (Warren & Karner, 2015) that are analyzed for themes. From a community-based viewpoint, the problem is that this process perpetuates dualism by treating these themes as

if they emerge separately from the researcher and community (Murphy & Schlaerth, 2014a), rather than co-created through discourse.

When CBPR involves identifying the boundaries of a community (Sullivan et al., 2003) using traditional approaches that entail the use of empirical indicators (Wallerstein, Duran, Minkler, & Foley, 2005), a community is likely to be considered as an object of study. From a community-based viewpoint, communities are constituted through participation (Murphy, 2014). Therefore, human action, rather than physical properties, are important for conceptualizing a community. And due to anti-dualism, what should be emphasized are the demonstrated commitments in a community (Murphy, 2012). Therefore, individuals decide if they are part of a community or not, and their actions confirm their membership.

In this way, a community is negotiated through participation. The possibilities of a community are specified by the ideas and skills of members, who may have otherwise been marginalized. Critics, however, may be wary of such inclusiveness and point to the likelihood for greater tension and controversy. But in a community-based approach, conflict and disagreement are not situations to fear and avoid, because persons can always navigate them in "face-to-face" discourse (Lévinas, 1969), or dialogue. Philosopher, Emmanuel Lévinas (1969), characterized true dialogue as intersubjective engagement in which individuals recognize and accept their uniqueness as well as their responsibility to one another.

Communities and researchers should interact through a subject-to-subject relationship. When efforts are grounded in the proper theory, this bond is like Buber's (1970) dialogical *I-Thou* relation, which entails much more than, for example, active listening or clear communication. After all, such technical elements are not sufficient for a project to become sensitive to the existential side of community life, whereby persons construct their unique realities and engage others. In the *I-Thou* relationship, there is reciprocity, mutuality, and the recognition of the other. Within a CBPR context, this connection relies on the willingness of researchers and community members to be completely present and open in exchanges.

From a community-based perspective, engagement is communication (Murphy 2014). But here again, understanding the theory that underpins this activity is vital. In this context, communication is based on reflexively entering the "life-world" (Shutz & Luckmann, 1973) of a community and reading accurately the collective narrative (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008), which is enriched with unique experiential and biographical information that is important for developing an appropriate intervention. In order to comprehend community issues and conditions, according to how members interpret these factors, community-engaged scholars need to acquire "communicative competence" (Habermas, 1970), which enables them to spot when communication is distorted in ways that hinder mutual understanding. With dualism undermined, this aim is possible to achieve.

The main idea is that the knowledge and reality of a community are constructed by its members (Gergen, 2009). Communities, therefore, can identify their issues and needs, as well as determine suitable strategies to address these considerations. In this regard, all projects should originate from the realities of communities that are (re)created constantly by their members.

This understanding has serious implications for the design of a community-based project. At the point when a decision must be made, adhering to an anti-dualistic stance can help to keep a project on track. But when participation is emphasized in practical, instead of theoretical, terms, plans can easily go off course. What is needed to avoid this potential pitfall, and ensure that efforts remain aligned with the goals of a community, is an epistemological shift that involves the appreciation of the inventive side of participation (Murphy, 2014).

50

Kang (2015) describes several ways a CBPR initiative that brought together adults and youth to create an intergenerational community organizing model to promote health was philosophically grounded. From the beginning to the end of the project, participants maintained an awareness of how their background and identities influenced their perspectives. From a community-based perspective, this reflective action is important for establishing dialogue (Gadamer, 1975). Rather than being concerned with objective knowledge, the participants of Kang's (2015) study discussed and reflected on activities, such as nature walks, story-telling, and exercise, which allowed for the co-creation of intersubjective, experiential knowledge. Thus, the epistemological stance of the process was participatory.

Moving Beyond the Theory-Practice Debate

A widely recognized issue for community-based endeavors is the need to minimize the gap between theory and practice (Goodson & Phillimore, 2012). The belief is that the application of theory to a project can improve outcomes (Gamble & Weil, 2010). Accordingly, action is used to test a particular theory, and reflection aids in identifying the necessary theoretical modifications, in order to better inform practice (Reed, 2005). In this way, theory is important for guiding a project. The problem is with the standard view of theory.

The theory of present concern, which is community-based, goes beyond the usual debate. What is critical to recognize is that this theory establishes the view to get at the local knowledge necessary to acquire *relevant* insight and promote *accurate* practice. When equipped with this understanding, researchers can be clear about appropriate "ways of knowing" (Gamble & Weil, 2010, p. 87) and what should be considered to be valuable knowledge.

Therefore, anyone who wants to work within a community-based framework should not view this theory to be optional, supplementary, or explanatory. More specifically, this basis should not be treated as something of minimal importance that is included in a project for the purposes of merely adhering to routine, complementing data, or explaining results. Instead, a particular epistemological maneuver, founded in anti-dualism, must be made for an initiative to become truly community-based. As a result of this shift, theory serves as a touchstone for making decisions, so that a community is integral to a project.

The key is that a theoretically informed outlook is sensitive to anything that may restrain community members from making contributions or realizing their vision. When theory is not engaged, researchers may not grasp how the position of the community may be undermined. As a result, they may work through an entire project under the false impression that their efforts are community-based. In such cases, an endeavor is community-based in name only.

What should be clear is that practice is not enough to make a project community-based. When dualism is maintained, crucial aspects of planning are understood to be technical matters. Issues are thus handled methodologically, which tends to create an illusion, based on empty claims, that a community has control of a project. With the proper epistemological orientation, however, the community becomes the heart and soul of these initiatives and, thus, community-based.

Conclusion

Nowadays, the persistent inequalities and enduring suffering that occur around the globe can easily lead to pessimistic outlooks, if not met with indifference. However, the idea of participation, particularly from a community-based perspective that emphasizes anti-dualism,

portrays the future in a hopeful light. That is, if persons are responsible for creating their worlds, they can make them free of social injustices.

Projects with this aim that are intended to be community-based are often supported by much good will. The persons who typically become involved in these initiatives generally believe that social change is possible and recognize that this outcome requires action (Koirala-Azad, 2009). Nevertheless, pure intentions, hard work, and useful skills can be undermined by adhering to traditional ideas about community, how communal problems should be identified, and what interventions are relevant. In this regard, facets of a project that *appear* to be community-based may, in actuality, detract from community goals, if the proper theory is not operative.

Given that participatory projects have an iterative, non-linear character (McIntrye, 2008), decisions may arise over their course that may not be straightforward. But when efforts are guided by participatory epistemology (Fals Borda, 1988), the questions that pertain to critical issues, such as group membership, community boundaries, and the proper location for an intervention, are simplified. In short, this type of theory can provide valuable answers, particularly for researchers who enter the field or a community for the first time. Aside from some relative experience, this understanding may be all that they have to rely on to carry out a project. When the innovative core of participation is appreciated fully, however, CBPR can promote the freedom of a community to imagine new possibilities, transform old ways of knowing, and pursue original ideas.

What is important for community-engaged scholars to understand is that a particular epistemological stance sustains the entire operation. With this insight, they should be able to gauge accurately a project, so that potentially constraining aspects can be exposed, ideally, before any action that may be detrimental to a community is taken. In this way, efforts will likely uphold the integrity of a community. After all, projects should never put a community in jeopardy.

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