

change rather than our inability to break free from a vicious political circle. It is becoming more evident that, just like the Movement's unclear agenda, the process of change to democracy sought even now has no clear agenda. People are even given an empty ballot paper that only helps to put into power pests that are out to make the most from the poor people's sweat. Untamable pests that rape the people's dream and subvert their aspirations of independence and freedom.

Shall Africa ever be free from untamed pests and night storms to be a democracy?

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Book Reviews

Nurtured by Knowledge: Learning to do Participatory Action-Research. Edited by Susan E Smith, Dennis K Willms & Nancy A Johnson, The Apex Press, New York, 1997, 279pp. Includes Foreword, Preface, Figures, Tables, Photographs and Bibliography

People's right to actively participate in the production of knowledge is hardly acknowledged in conventional academic research. Participatory Action-Research (PAR) however, not only acknowledges people's right to participate in the generation and consumption of knowledge, but also consciously strives to promote it. PAR involves people in the entire research process in the hope that it would have a transformative effect on them. Paulo Freire captures the transformative character of PAR in the foreword to the volume thus: "*People rupture their existing attitudes of silence, accommodation and passivity, and gain confidence and abilities to alter unjust conditions and structures*" (p xi).

The volume *Nurtured by Knowledge: Learning to do Participatory Action-Research* attempts to shed some light on the involvement of people in the research process.

The book has seven chapters: six case study reports and one theoretical article. The six case studies from Mexico, Canada, Honduras, Uganda, India and Chile are used to illustrate concepts and principles of Participatory Action-Research.

In the first case study Gerald Debank (a Canadian dairy farmer) and Arturo Ornelas (a Mexican educator and community activist) narrate their experiences "*full of twists, questions, doubts as well as moments of great joy*"

working together with local Mexican subsistence farmers, the *campesinos*. Their experiences are drawn from their participation in "Cows for Campesinos Project" in which Canadian farmers donated cows to Mexican farmers.

The second case study report by Mary Law demonstrates the transformative nature of Participatory Action-Research. She documents efforts of parents of disabled children and the researcher (facilitator) to change disabling environments in Ontario, Canada.

Patricia Seymour in the third case study uses Participatory Action-Research to discover the main factors that promote or inhibit women's use of government health services in Northern India. By the end of the research, not only did Patricia discover the said factors but also increased her understanding of PAR as "*a broad approach to problem-solving and communicating.*" This approach is entrenched in cooperation and egalitarianism.

In the article "*We are Dying. It is Finished,*" based on a Ugandan case study, Patricia Spittal and others weave ethnographic research design to participatory approach. This way, the authors capture the life experiences of women who "*fear and suffer the consequences of HIV/AIDS.*" The authors listened to the women's experiences, shared their suffering, mourned their losses, consoled them and created awareness.

In the fifth case study report Maria-Ines Arratia and Isabel de la Maza document their experiences working with the Aymara people of Chile. Their experiences highlight the importance of Participatory Action-Research in strengthening communities, fostering local organisation and in the process transforming local realities.

In the sixth case study report Arturo Ornelas presents Participatory Action-Research as a way of life involving vulnerability, risk-taking trust, openness, patience and impatience. According to him, social participation in Honduras enables people to be directly involved in decisions that affect their lives.

Participatory Action-Research as an interactive learning process stands out in the six case study reports. The authors (also participants) describe their experiences and actions revealing their own reactions, doubts and learning. The Ugandan and the Indian cases, for instance, capture the twists and turns that characterise PAR: moments of uncertainty, confusion and frustration. This demonstrates the extent to which PAR immersed the participants in the problems and in the problem-solving process.

Susan Smith kneads the case study experience into a theoretical exposition in the last chapter. She deduces from the case study reports a spiralling sequential framework of Participatory Action-Research. The elements of this framework include: knowing self, seeking connections, grounding in context, beginning praxis, experiencing conscientisation and awakening in that order. The last element – awakening – creates a new quest of being (knowing self) and the

Participatory Action-Research spiral then enters a new phase.

By bringing together the case study reports and the theoretical exposition, the editors manage to immerse the reader in the theory and practice of PAR because the lessons learned in the case studies are consolidated into principles of participatory research methodology.

The volume's appeal and readability is greatly enhanced by the participatory style of reporting which enables the authors to share their experiences in an involving manner. In this regard it is worth noting that in virtually all the case study reports, the authors use the first person (I, we) rather than the third person style commonly used in academic writing. Occasional use of dialogue (direct speech) and local terms such as *campesinos* (Mexican subsistence farmer) and *dais* (traditional village birth attendant, North India) effectively usher the reader into the world of Participatory Action-Research.

The volume is certainly valuable to students, teachers and other people interested in learning to undertaking Participatory Action-Research. In fact the book goes beyond "Learning to do PAR" to nurture and advocate for it.

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"Gay and Lesbian Professionals in the Closet. Who's In. Who's Out, and Why?" edited by Teresa De Crescenzo, published by Harrington Park Press, New York. An imprint of The Haworth Press, Inc, New York (1997), 94pp inc index. ISBN: 0-7890-0331-7 (h/b); 1-56023-104-1 (p/b). Price: \$US29.95 (h/b); \$US14.95 (p/b).

Aim of the book and who it is directed at

By outlining experiences of several gay professionals, the book aims at critically reviewing the disclosure process. Authors of several articles in the book acknowledge the complications of the disclosure process and talk about disadvantages and advantages of coming out of the closet, limiting these mostly to gay and lesbian professionals mainly in the helping professions, eg, psychotherapists, personnel in psychiatric settings, religious workers such as priests, etc.

In the foreword, the book's Editor Teresa De Crescenzo, speaking from experience, encourages gay closeted professionals to come out of the closet and the message she puts across is for these professionals in the closet to speak up and out.

De Crescenzo acknowledges that there may be dangers involved in speaking out but she outlines the advantages for the person concerned as:

- self fulfilment
- not being stifled.