

Undertaking research and using research findings

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Research

- Research is an **ORGANISED** way of **FINDING ANSWERS** to **QUESTIONS**.
- **ORGANISED** in that there is a method in going about doing research that is planned, focused and limited to a specific scope.
- **FINDING ANSWERS** is the end of all research. Sometimes the answer is no, but it is still an answer.
- **QUESTIONS** are central to research. Research is focused on relevant, useful, and important questions. Without a question, research has no focus, drive, or purpose.

Research on/with/for people

- Getting knowledge from people is complex for two main reasons: human agency and the effects of power.
- Human beings have **agency** which means that they react to situations and construct meanings for the events in which they participate so we have to take into account how people interpret situations.
- **Power** – The relations between the researcher and the researched are always unequal and this needs to be remembered when interpreting data. A particular example of this unequal relationship is the Milgram experiments where people were willing to give apparently life-threatening electric shocks to subjects.

Facts and values: objectivity and interpretation

- The relationship between 'facts' and 'values' underlies many of the arguments about research and its objectivity. Three main views:
 - 1) Value judgements will always bias research but the more such bias can be eliminated the better the research
 - 2) All facts and information are value laden, but this is not helpfully described as 'bias' because this assumes that there is a neutral view. Instead it is argued that knowledge of human beings always comes from the perspective of the knower.
 - 3) Knowledge gets its meaning from the political position of the knowers, as well as from other value systems. This means that any research into issues such as gender, race, class or sexuality is inevitably imbued with political values.

Defining the research

- What do you want to find out?
- What are the features of the context in which the research will be taken?
- What is the problem to be investigated?
- What kind of information is required?
- How will it be collected and analysed?
- How will the findings be you disseminated?

Research in community settings

- How can we draw on local knowledge of what the problems are that need to be addressed?
- How can these issues be investigated?
- What data can be collected easily and economically?
- How can these data be analysed?
- How can the findings be discussed and explored?
- What action can be taken as a result?

Making a difference

- What methods can we use to draw on and disseminate our work together?
- What changes do we want to happen as a result of our research?
- Who needs to hear about our findings?
- How can communities participate in further investigations?

Using research findings

- People living in disadvantaged communities rarely have their voices heard so it is vital to listen to them and treat them with respect.
- The research should be located in the wider political and social context so that it is not seen as being solely about a particular community.
- The research should be seen as illustrative of a particular issue and draw on other studies/literature to illustrate its importance in the wider context.

Conclusion

- Drawing on bottom-up, community-based knowledge can be empowering.
- People's knowledge is enhanced when the problems they identify, and the understanding that they have about potential solutions, are treated with respect.
- This kind of research is partisan but that is to be celebrated rather than denigrated.
- Finally we can only really enhance our work with communities if we are clear about what will make a difference and using research is a powerful tool to help us do just that.