

Opportunities and Challenges of Participative Research Methods with Young People

Key Note at the ECREA TWG Children and Media Workshop,
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Outline

- (1) Need of alternative methods
- (2) Participatory research as one possible alternative
- (3) Examples for participatory audience research
- (4) Challenges, Chances and suggestions for future research

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Challenges for audience research

- transformation of the classical media environment to a digital ecology
- young people's ways of using and interpreting media differ far from classical ,viewing' or ,reading
- age gap: researchers as digital immigrants

Need for alternative methods

- traditional academic outside position
- missing reference points for estimating and evaluating research

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Origin of participatory research

- Lewin's action theory approach (1940ies)
- focus of research more on societal problems than on the researcher's interests
- research topics related to issues of power and/or discrimination against minority groups
- **direct integration of research subjects**
- circular research design

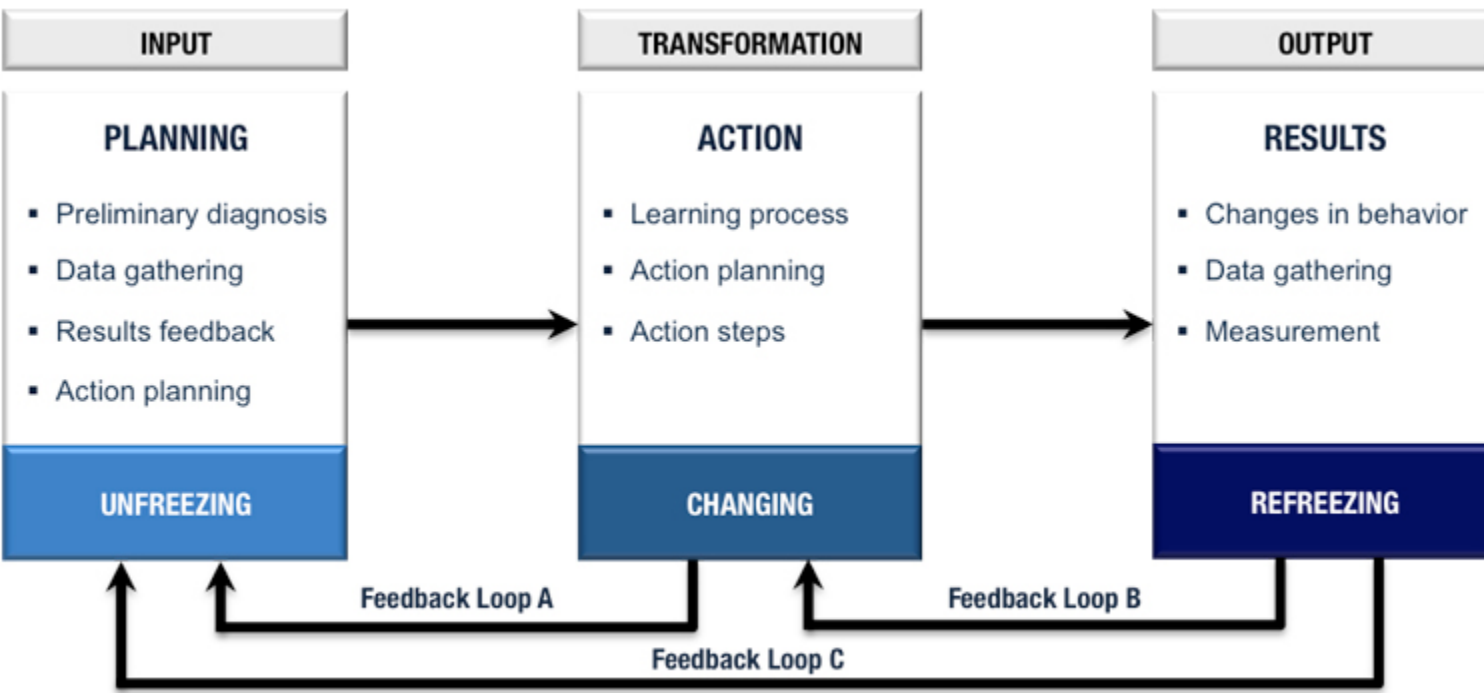
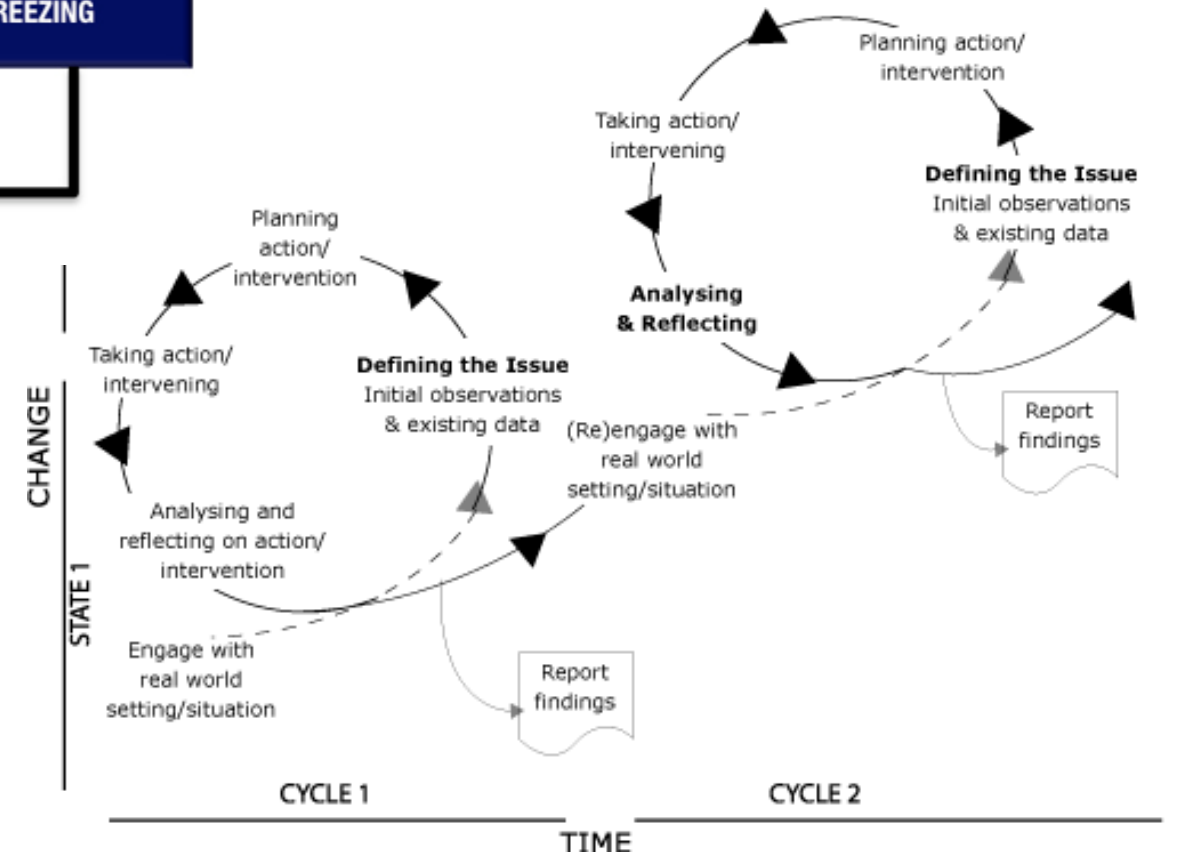


Figure 1

Models of (participatory) action research



Development of participatory research

- 1970ies popular in education, sociology, social work
- today popular in ‚practice research‘ in the USA, Latin America and Africa

Critique:

- *missing methodological standards*
- *low intersubjective verifiability*
- *danger of inductivism*
- *overly focussed on practical benefits – loosing sight of theoretical foundations*

Possible alternative

Integration of the target group leads to deeper insights into their daily lives:

- specification of the research question
- perceiving social situations from the perspective of the target group
- discussion/ evaluation of the research results

Challenges for participative audience research

- societal role of audience research → the aim is *not* solving social problems
- avoiding deviations from the project objectives → linear instead of circular research design

Integrating young people

- not every step of the research process is hierarchically fixed
- discussions in the beginning help to sharpen the focus of the research question(s)
- advisors during the development of the research instrument(s) – superior to pre-testing
- participation in the data collection (peer research)
- discussion and interpretation of research findings
- constant reflection and evaluation of the research process

Import for participative audience research

Young people must...

- be prepared as ‚assistant researchers‘!
- valued as experts of their age group!
- be taught the principles and methods of audience research.

Important for participative audience research

- detailed documentation of the research process
- ensure intersubjective verifiability

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Transferred elements of participatory research

- integration of young people as co-researchers during the whole research process
- specification of the research question through discussion with young people
- development of research instruments in collaboration with young people
- preparation of young people to conduct independent data collection (focus group discussion and content analysis)
- discussion and interpretation of the results with young people

Study I: Model Casting Shows in Austria (Wijnen 2011)

- screening questionnaire (N=276)
- 8 focus group discussions (n=51)
- 17 guided interviews (10 girls, 7 boys)

- age: 15-19 years

- data analysis: thematic coding (Strauss & Corbin 1998)

Research Design (1)

Preparation:

- workshops for young people (media socialisation, gender, scientific work & methods, content analysis)
- development of the research questions together with the young people

Research Design (2)

Data collection:

- input to the research instruments
- focus group discussions conducted by young people (documentation by researchers)
- semi-structured interviews conducted by researchers

Research Design (3)

Data analysis:

- interview transcripts by young people
- coding/ analysis by researchers – coding system discussed with young people and subsequently modified

Interpretation:

- researchers together with young people

Lessons learned from study I

Positive experiences

- feedback and pretest interview guide
- focus group discussions as peer talk
- feedback to interpretation of the results
- constant evaluation of the whole research process

Problems

- time consuming (training, supervising)
- switching between interviewer and participant of the focus group
- quickly „working off“ the interview guide
- too strong engagement – suggestive questioning

→ great importance of the focus group transcript

Added value of study I

Young People

- insight into audience research
- media literacy

Researchers

- better insight into the research topic with regards to the role of neo liberal values

Study II: SNS and Concepts of Privacy

(Pscheida & Trültzsch 2009)

- 26 young people as researchers AND people researched
- age: 17-19 years
- analysis of photos on SNS by the use of semantic differentials

Research Design (1)

- preparatory workshop on social web and SNS
- training the method of semantic differentials
- creating semantic differentials for the research project by young people

Research Design (2)

- ranking and reducing the found semantic differentials in a group discussion
- 9 photos from the German SNS StudiVZ chosen by the researchers
- rating and analysing these photos by young researchers

Research Design (3)

- discussion of the results by the young people
- Analysis of the discussions and the semantic differentials by the researchers

Lessons learned from study II

Positive experiences

- productive group discussions
- strong engagement of young people
- semantic differentials that are important to the target group
- more insights into the meaning of privacy
- constant evaluation of the whole research process

Problems

- time consuming (training, supervising)
- discussions on every step of research
 - conflicts on categories
 - diverse categories to be reduced

Added value of study II

Young People

- insight into audience research
- rethinking SNS use
- media literacy

Researchers

- better insight into the research topic with regards to the live worlds of young people

What can be learned from these methodological experiments?

- It is possible to integrate participatory designs in audience research, but it is not easy to adapt them.
- A linear research design seems to be more useful than a circular one.
- Detailed documentation of the whole research process is necessary.

What can be learned from these methodological experiments?

- Generation and (sub/youth) cultural bias can be reduced by participatory designs.
- Participatory designs demand constant evaluation of the research process.
- Participatory designs are very time consuming.

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Participatory audience research

- there is not one (only) way of integrating young people
- absolute participative designs (like the studies presented)
- participative approaches integrated in wider mixed methods designs

Important for participatory research

- young people must be prepared and trained as co-researchers
- a constant documentation of the research process

THANK YOU!

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