

9-22-2016

Community-Based Participatory Research and the Co-Construction of Community Knowledge

Karie Jo Peralta

University of Toledo, karie.peralta@utoledo.edu

John W. Murphy

University of Miami

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr>



Part of the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended APA Citation

Peralta, K. J., & Murphy, J. W. (2016). Community-Based Participatory Research and the Co-Construction of Community Knowledge. *The Qualitative Report*, 21(9), 1713-1726. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2016.2526>

This How To Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Qualitative Report at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Qualitative Report by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact nsuworks@nova.edu.



Qualitative Research Graduate Certificate
Indulge in Culture
Exclusively Online • 18 Credits
LEARN MORE

NSU
NOVA SOUTHEASTERN
UNIVERSITY

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN

Community-Based Participatory Research and the Co-Construction of Community Knowledge

Abstract

From a community-based perspective, all that is known about a community is obtained through intersubjective engagement. But how, exactly, is knowledge socially constructed and revealed in community-based projects? This article addresses this question by focusing on the use of narratives to understand a community. First, the importance of stories for gaining insight into a community's reality is presented, followed by an examination of how this information should be accessed and engaged. The principles of Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) that are consistent with this narrative approach are then discussed. Next, reflexivity is described to be the key for reading properly a community's story. Finally, the conclusion points to the cooperative component of knowledge creation.

Keywords

Community-Based Participatory Research, Intersubjectivity, Reflexivity, Community

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Community-Based Participatory Research and the Co-Construction of Community Knowledge

Karie Jo Peralta

University of Toledo, Toledo, Ohio, USA

John W. Murphy

University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida, USA

From a community-based perspective, all that is known about a community is obtained through intersubjective engagement. But how, exactly, is knowledge socially constructed and revealed in community-based projects? This article addresses this question by focusing on the use of narratives to understand a community. First, the importance of stories for gaining insight into a community's reality is presented, followed by an examination of how this information should be accessed and engaged. The principles of Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) that are consistent with this narrative approach are then discussed. Next, reflexivity is described to be the key for reading properly a community's story. Finally, the conclusion points to the cooperative component of knowledge creation. Keywords: Community-Based Participatory Research, Intersubjectivity, Reflexivity, Community

A community-based orientation (Murphy, 2014) promotes a phenomenological view of a community as a *lebenswelt* or “life-world” (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973), which is an interpretive realm formed by community members’ beliefs about their histories, norms, and values. What is recognized is that human action, rather than objective knowledge, is key for identifying a community (Butcher, 2007). With dualism undermined, a community is therefore not a thing. Through participation and interpersonal confirmation between members, particularly dialogue, a community is created and sustained (Buber, 1965). In this sense, discourse is a community, and language is essential for understanding its reality.

All that is known about a community, including its values and assumptions, is thus obtained through language (Lyotard, 1984). Accordingly, knowledge of a community is never encountered, but constructed via a social process of recognition and coordination of action (Gergen, 2009). And given this intersubjective engagement (Buber, 1970), a community should not be considered to have objective parameters.

But how, exactly, is knowledge socially constructed and revealed in community-based projects? This article addresses this question by focusing on the use of narratives to understand a community (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2013). First, the importance of stories for gaining insight into a community’s reality is presented, followed by an examination of how this information should be accessed and engaged. The principles of Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) that are consistent with this narrative approach are then discussed. Next, reflexivity is described to be the key for reading properly a community’s story (Murphy & Schlaerth, 2014a). Finally, the conclusion points to the cooperative component of knowledge creation.

Knowledge and Narrative

Realism is passé in community-based work. Consistent with the principle of participation, epistemological assumptions are at the root of a community. Human action,

accordingly, is essential to differentiating fact from fiction. A community is thus not objective and necessarily associated with empirical referents. Local knowledge, instead, is a product of these assumptions and viewed to be constructed.

When constructivism is invoked, however, a community may consist of multiple realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Rooted in relativism, a community begins to reflect a confluence of perspectives that provide both harmony and conflict. In this way, a community may be difficult to identify but is not ethereal. The presence of multiple perspectives does not necessarily obscure the reality of a community.

But this rejection of objectivity does not imply that a community must be viewed subjectively. The problem with subjectivity is that this position ultimately treats community knowledge as something that can be grasped directly, if the proper sensitivity is operative. Given the linguistic turn (Lyotard, 1984), however, everything is known indirectly through speech and must be enticed into the open. Nothing, even subjectivity, escapes interpretation and is readily encountered.

According to Heidegger (1962), discourse is poetic. What he means is that language can be interpreted in many ways, and, moreover, speech does not have a logical structure or parameters that allow reality to be mimicked in a precise way. Knowledge, therefore, based solely on culture, communication, or some other manifestation of human action is never readily apparent. Rather than relying on the “representational thesis” that assumes the world can be reflected by language, dialogue is needed to ensure a common understanding of reality (Rorty, 1979).

In light of this emphasis on language, a community-based framework (Butcher, 2007) recognizes that intersubjectivity and reflexivity are necessary to construct, and understand, the reality of a community (Delanty, 2010). Through interpersonal negotiation and confirmation, persons make sense of their historical background, current context, and past experiences. In other words, a community’s biography (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) may become known through dialogue and social relationships (Gergen, 2009). These stories, accordingly, hold the key to community understanding.

A Community Consists of a Story

Due to the inventive quality of language (Lyotard, 1984), a community consists of a story, or various competing stories, woven together. The idea is that a community’s story is created linguistically through interpersonal engagement, and therefore developed neither from an objective nor subjective position (Buber, 1965).

Guided by the work of Wittgenstein (1958), persons are believed to organize, and give meaning to, communal life through speech acts and participation in what are called “language games” (Lyotard, 1984). These games have rules that influence how reality is perceived, and thus how a communal narrative is created. How persons take part in the game can lead to changes in reality and its interpretation. In other words, language creates conditions and opens social possibilities that were otherwise thought to be predetermined.

According to Roland Barthes (1985), “everything is language, nothing escapes language” (p. 153). Persons, therefore, cannot avoid constant linguistic immersion. As should be noted, this position challenges the traditional indexical thesis. Specifically, language should no longer be thought to be a tool that can be used to point out or highlight things in the world (Murphy, 1989). Speech, instead, invents rather than reflects reality (Wittgenstein, 1958).

Contrary to a dualistic stance, human praxis and intersubjective discourse produce a community’s norms, values, and traditions, which constitute the biographical logic for the behaviors and decisions of community members (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This story is

“locally determined” (Lyotard, 1984, p. 67) and considered to be a valid portrayal, for example, of how these persons view themselves, each other, and their future.

But who writes the story of a community? Essentially, community members are the authors. After all, they have intimate knowledge of, and experience in, the community, which can be integrated into a coherent narrative. Stemming from the “collective praxis” (Sartre, 1976, p. 505) of community members, a story may be generated from the synthesis of their interpretations of communal life.

Ideally, everyone has the opportunity to participate in the creation of a community’s narrative. A community-based perspective, however, is critical of views that assume possibilities for developing a pluralistic story are uninhibited. Without considering the historical context, cultural incongruences, power imbalances, as well as how these factors relate to the material and structural conditions that influence participation, there is no prospect for marginalized views to be integrated into a community’s story (Dussel & Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Giroux, 1995).

Dominant community members often have the resources and skills to maintain the status quo. Equipped with this advantage, they may shape discourse that further impedes the participation of unprivileged groups (Pedroni, 2006). When knowledge is problematized (Freire, 1970), however, hegemonic agendas may become apparent. Accordingly, a key question is, “Who does the story serve?” This concern may be a starting point for examining whose interests are prioritized in a community’s narrative, so that the terrain for participation may be leveled to allow previously excluded persons to have a position in the creating process.

From the outset of a project, the focus of planners should be entering the narrative of a community. Because a community and its story are constructed intersubjectively, dialogue is essential for this activity. Once access is achieved, they can begin to engage in an accurate reading of the story and understand a community (Murphy, 2014a). This aim, however, is not achieved alone.

A Guide Is Needed

The traditional concern of planners is gathering data. A community-based approach, however, recognizes that this information is not “out there” in the community to find, but is revealed through conversations that uncover the meanings that community members give to their local conditions, relationships, and histories (Blackshaw, 2010). In this way, knowledge of a community is not data; the wrong descriptive is operative. Rather than data, a story should be entertained.

From this perspective, planners who are interested in the rigorous application of the scientific method will overlook opportunities to grasp valuable information, because the story of a community is deemed to be irrelevant. In fact, the notion that a community entails a story is likely to be scoffed at for obscuring the empirical traits that are thought traditionally to be the source of valid information (Delanty, 1997). Specifically, stories are believed to be nothing more than fictional tales or myths that mislead the investigative process, as well as give the impression of an unsophisticated methodology (Yip Pui Lin, 2013).

Planners who adhere to community-based philosophy (Murphy, 2014a), however, take these stories seriously. In other words, they recognize that a community’s narrative holds crucial information, and therefore should be treated as truly significant. In a word, the story of a community is respected.

Furthermore, community-based planners take a position that allows them to learn the rules of the community’s language game, so that they have a chance to understand the local, operative logic (Wittgenstein, 1958). This achievement, however, requires entrée to the story that has been created and handed down about communal life. For this reason, a guide is needed.

According to contemporary writers, each language game leads to a certain, and potentially distinct, rendition of reality (Murphy, 2012). For the realist, this possibility can only result in a situation that is unworkable, due to the perceived lack of a single source of reliable knowledge. But from a community-based perspective, community members are capable of engaging one another in order to mesh their individual narratives, and construct a unified understanding of their community based on their joint “stock of knowledge” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 41).

The prevailing story captures what phenomenologists call the “paramount reality” (Schutz, 1962, p. 230) of a community. Specifically, members intersubjectively come to recognize certain norms and values, which arise from various opposing perspectives, to be important for maintaining particular arrangements and the stability of a community, at least until different standards are considered to be more relevant. Although this process leads to a portrayal of a reality that seems to be “externalized” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 61), truth is always rooted in interpretation (Gadamer, 1975). A story is never autonomous but always has an author and a reader, in other words, a location and competing interpretations.

Comprehension of this dominant reality, however, is reached at points when language games connect (Lyotard, 1984). As a result of this occurrence, the story that corresponds to a community’s paramount reality (Schutz, 1962) may emerge. Nevertheless, in the same way that a community’s reality should not be viewed to be autonomous, neither should its story. In other words, a story is never encountered. Because language mediates everything, a story is shaped and appreciated through discourse (Lyotard, 1984).

Due to the pervasiveness of language (Derrida, 1978), persons must sort through the various linguistic layers of a community in order to communicate effectively. By interacting directly with one another through what Paul de Man (1979) calls “double rapport” (p. 264), views held by community members may be engaged, reflected on, and properly interpreted. Habermas (1970) refers to this intimate understanding as “communicative competence.”

This competence, however, is an existential, rather than methodological issue (Murphy, 1989). Specifically, technical proficiency plays a limited role in understanding a community’s narrative. Instead of a proper sample size, what is crucial is the ability to delve into the reality that is created and regularly modified by community members. This task can only be accomplished through reflexivity, whereby critical awareness allows one to see where personal perspective stops and the worldviews of others begin (Cunliffe & Easterby-Smith, 2004). But how can persons be sure that they are figuring out the meaning intended by the author? This potentially complex task is made feasible when an appropriate guide takes the lead.

Nonetheless, at least in community-based work, a guide does not simply present information to a planner. After all, such a strategy is predicated on dualism and assumes that knowledge is always encountered. The problem is that a community’s story is not engaged in such a simplistic way.

Constructing the World through Reading

In order to be true to the collective narrative, a story must be correctly read. In the words of Barthes (1987), the planner “should read as people write” (p. 69). Gadamer (1975) identifies a similar concern in relation to the need to understand how persons create their history, so that their past can be truly appreciated. Because elements of the past and present are enmeshed in stories (Rigg & Murphy, 2013), learning to read properly is a skill community-based planners need to acquire.

Particularly important is that a story does not simply emerge to be recounted. Rather, a story must be read as intended by the author (de Man, 1979). This regard for the relationship between the story, its author, and the reader was famously given attention to by Michel

Foucault (1977) in his lecture turned essay, “What is an Author?” What he attacks is the “author effect,” which is based on the assumption that authors have natural heroic or sacred traits that are revealed in their work. Reading, therefore, is a passive process, whereby the reader becomes attuned properly to a text.

Rather than authors “disappearing,” a misconception of Foucault’s critique, authors should be viewed to be “initiators of discursive practices” (Foucault, 1977, p. 131). Consistent with a community-based framework (Murphy, 2014a) that promotes the story of a community to be an ongoing construction, community members, in their authorial position, launch an “endless possibility of discourse” (p. 131). In this regard, authors retain their importance, although their identities and intentions are elusive.

Barthes (1977), however, argues in his essay, “The Death of the Author,” that focusing on the author’s intention limits the meaning of the text. Instead, he suggests that there be consideration for the infinite interpretations that may be given by the readers. Although the implication of this viewpoint, specifically the recognition of multiple interpretations, is compatible with a community-based approach (Baker & Motton, 2005), this position should not be mistaken to advance the idea that all interpretations are of equal value, and that the fundamental perspective of a community is not necessary.

When guided by a community-based perspective (Murphy, 2014a), there is a particular group that should guide all interpretations. Because community members use their insight to define their conditions and, in turn, tell their story, the interpretations of community members are elevated in importance. Any possibility of relying on extreme relativist claims is thus avoided.

Nevertheless, as planners attempt to read the narrative of a community, their story might get in the way. But when a guide is present, planners can check to see that they understand correctly a community’s story. However, there is more to attaining this assurance than simply receiving feedback. Reflection and constant playback are necessary for a correct reading. These components facilitate the critique needed to recognize assumptions and other elements that may distort the original meaning of the narrative (Antonacopoulou, 2004).

Understanding the context of this community writing is crucial (Trahar, 2013). Without situating the story within the relevant frame of reference, all interpretations will be misguided. A story, therefore, should not be considered in isolation, but with the corresponding background information (Therrien & Kubina, 2007). This connection allows the reader to comprehend the author’s intentions. When properly undertaken, CBPR has these elements.

CBPR

The Community as a Guide

A central aim of community-based projects is to attend to concerns that are meaningful to a community (Chilisa & Chilisa, 2012). Local knowledge is thus elevated in importance. Community-based planners, accordingly, attempt to engage communities in ways that facilitate the revelation of this information. These stories are thus entered, so that what a community needs or wants can be correctly ascertained.

This activity calls for persons to engage with the author for direction. Because community members are the authors of their story, they serve as guides. From a community-based outlook, however, guides do much more than merely identify important data; they reveal how this information should be appreciated (Murphy, 2014a).

In this sense, the guidance of community members is more crucial than simply the insight provided by typical key informants (McKenna et al., 2011). When a community is viewed to be dialogue, what is “key” about members is not simply the “insider” perspective

that they can offer (Eng et al., 2005), but their competence in navigating the complexities of communal life in a way that allows these elements to be understood by others. Achieving mutual understanding is vital to accurate reading.

Community health workers (Behforouz, Farmer, & Mukherjee, 2004), for example, fulfill the guide role. The American Public Health Association (2009) describes these persons to be “liaisons” between service providers and communities. Because they are often from the communities in which they work, they share values and experiences with other community members. Therefore, community health workers are counted on often to not only grant access to, and develop relationships with a community, but to ensure that projects are culturally appropriate (Behforouz et al., 2004; Rosenthal et al., 2010).

From a community-based perspective, however, community health workers should be viewed to be more than merely links to a community; they should be considered guides. More critical than their ability to facilitate entry into a community is their skill at providing access to the narrative of this group. And their cultural knowledge is valuable to preserve the integrity of the knowledge contained in the story, so that a project may be sensitive to communal norms and traditions.

Guides, therefore, make the story of a community available to others. And this accessibility determines opportunities for “co-learning,” which is considered to be a principle of CBPR (Israel et al., 1998). Specifically, planners can become familiar with local knowledge, while community members can develop research and project-planning capacities (Bell et al., 2012). The goal is that learning will be reciprocal, based on the exchange of skills and knowledge (Kawulich & Ogletree, 2012). This outcome, however, is predicated on the idea that knowledge is not only learned cooperatively but also co-created.

The Co-Construction of Community Knowledge

Stemming from the social constructionist (Harris, 2010) dimension of community-based philosophy (Murphy, 2014a), CBPR is predicated on the co-construction of community knowledge. This principle is based on a specific principle of community-based planning, that is, truth is tied to the ways in which community members define themselves (Murphy & Callaghan, 1988). Whether knowledge is jointly created, however, depends on intersubjective engagement (Buber, 1970). Thus, dialogue is necessary.

What the idea of co-construction suggests is that the planner’s perspective may be incorporated into the narrative of a community. Careful consideration should be given to this point, however, because the voice of a community should never be undermined (Kawulich & Ogletree, 2012).

Specifically, what should be noted is that planners do not contribute automatically to the construction of a community’s narrative. Just like all community members, they have views that are subject to critique, and only become part of the collective story when others confirm this inclusion. Although a planner’s epistemological standpoint may obscure a community’s story, this additional viewpoint may, if properly corroborated, amplify the narrative of this group.

Moreover, because there is never a “final account” (Butler, 2002, p. 36) of reality, the narrative of a community is an ongoing creation. In light of this outlook, community members, including planners, can (re)interpret communal life in ways that may translate into new possibilities within the current context. These possibilities may become apparent only if there is openness to different perspectives of the community’s story.

In this regard, the emphasis on co-learning in the original CBPR principle (Israel et al., 1998) is perhaps misplaced. Rather than an outcome, co-learning should be viewed to be a key

process in community-based projects. Indeed, there is always the possibility for new insight to be gained, as well as the story of a community being expanded.

Consistent with this perspective is the way in which Gadamer (1975) recognizes how understanding occurs through dialogical processes. Such practices create spaces for any person to participate in knowledge construction, and allow for all views to be given equal consideration. However, with community members guiding these activities, the development of a community's story is under collective supervision.

Creating Conditions for Inclusion

A primary principle of CBPR is that projects incorporate all pertinent stakeholders (Israel et al., 1998). Often community participation is promoted through a series of steps devoted to developing and carrying out a plan for action (McQuiston et al., 2005). This concern for inclusion, however, should be present when reading the narrative of a community, particularly when various views are deemed to be relevant to the story at hand.

Because communities are heterogeneous (Day, 2006), members are likely to have conflicting views. Therefore, a community should not be assumed to have a single narrative. This point does not suggest that identifying a unified story is impossible. Rather, from a community-based perspective, what should be recognized is the prospect of a community to have a multifaceted story that encompasses different interpretations (Murphy, 2014b).

But how can planners ensure that they take into account stories that are marginalized within communities? Having competent guides may help to overcome a one-dimensional view of communal life and not inadvertently overlook other perspectives. When there is caution to understand the comprehensive story that incorporates all of the viewpoints that the community considers to be important, the result should be an inclusive basis for a project. However, if attention is geared only toward technical procedures for increasing participation in planning phases, those members whose story is not contained within the current collective narrative may not see a reason to participate¹. Widespread input is unimportant if certain perspectives are discredited *a priori*.

Community Control

The main idea of community-oriented initiatives is that topics should be directed by community members (Kawulich & Ogletree, 2012). Accordingly, decision-making is led by these persons. Typical CBPR approaches attend to issues, and involve strategies, that are designed, implemented, and evaluated by those who have created the community narrative (Gómez & Sordé Marti, 2012).

In light of community-based philosophy (Murphy, 2014a), community members are also behind the construction of the local knowledge that comprises a community's narrative. Often, however, the histories of marginalized communities are written from a privileged perspective, and members are told what matters about their past (Spring, 2013). As a result, their interpretations are missing typically from these accounts. An emphasis on participation in co-constructing the narrative of a community is, therefore, a key point at which the community can begin to exercise control over their lives and future plans.

¹ A core value of community-based projects is democracy (Brown & Reitsma-Street, 2003). Therefore, insuring that democratic conditions are established is a major concern. Typical CBPR approaches try to address this issue by creating a space that allows all persons to supply their input (Cartland, Ruch-Ross, & Mason, 2012). This effort is meaningless, however, unless all types of views, including those that are unpopular and marginalized, receive equal attention and fair consideration.

Assumed by the process of co-creation is that equity is present. All members of a true community, accordingly, are included in the process of creating the narrative that reveals facts and dreams. No-one in a real community is marginalized; this inclusion is the ethical base of a community-based project. But how is this position maintained? The simple answer is through reflexivity.

CBPR and Reflexivity

Although having community members as guides is necessary for interpreting correctly a group's story, their assistance is not sufficient. What is key to reading the narrative is reflection (Squire, Andrews, & Tamboukou, 2013). Because no-one is a blank slate (Kant, 1965), reflection is required to grasp any story. Specifically, reflection allows for the limitations of personal viewpoints to become clear, and the knowledge constructed by a community, and embedded in its narrative, to be understood (Murphy & Schlaerth, 2014a). Inclusion is thus fostered.

Practitioners approach reflection typically as an opportunity for learning (McIntyre, 2008). But when the mind is viewed to be active (Kant, 1965), reflection is a creative process. This understanding is based on a Kantian perspective on how persons can use their critical capacity to construct new ways of conceptualizing knowledge and recognize its applicability (Murphy & Schlaerth, 2014b).

Conceiving of reflection as merely a learning activity encourages persons to be passive. In this sense, all that is necessary is to be attentive and attuned to the narrative of a community. Although a link between human action and knowledge construction may be recognized, particularly if a constructivist perspective is employed, encountering a narrative is not the same as understanding. What is overlooked specifically is the personal influence in producing knowledge (Steier, 1991).

In other words, persons may highlight and recount information, but fail to appreciate their part in the co-construction of knowledge (Gergen & Gergen, 1991). For example, such mindfulness is not promoted in efforts intended to remove bias or provide feedback. Yet, even approaches that seemingly elevate participation often lack reflection. Without this activity, the very thing intended to be undermined is reinforced. That is, dualism persists because the constructions of others appear to be objective (Steier, 1991).

Social constructionists, however, recognize that they are involved in constructing knowledge (Steier, 1991), particularly through language (Gergen & Gergen, 1991). According to Gergen and Gergen (1991), "the emphasis is thus not on the individual mind but on the meanings generated by people as they collectively generate descriptions and explanations in language" (p. 78). Although community-based projects often recognize the social construction of knowledge (Andharia & Hardikar, 2012), the reflection that is offered is not always profound.

Re-Conceptualizing Reflection in CBPR

When planners are granted access to a community's story, and given guidance in its interpretation, they are also permitted to participate in the invention of communal knowledge. Through reflexivity an awareness of this involvement is fostered, and planners see that they are part of the knowledge generation process (Alvesson, 2002; Steier, 1991). In fact, relying on guidance without engaging in reflection perpetuates realism, because a community's story can only be retold.

Given the recognition that everyone is always constructing, rethinking how reflection is used in CBPR is fundamentally important. Typically, CPBR projects follow an action-

reflection model (Hacker, 2013). As an iterative approach, CBPR includes phases that are dedicated to reflection on experiences, observations, and actions that relate to the focus of a project (Baker & Motton, 2005). What occurs, generally, is that community members meet to discuss openly their thoughts, as well as debate ideas that could be put into practice.

The current status of CBPR limits reflection to be an activity that turns others into objects of thought (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973). However, because co-construction is ongoing, CBPR should entail reflexivity that promotes intersubjectivity (Buber, 1970) throughout a project. Rather than basing certain stages on reflection (Baker & Motton, 2005), this effort should accompany every facet of a project. In this way, numerous aspects, issues, and ideas will be considered through reflection that may not have been given attention during a typical meeting. To be clear, abandoning these activities is not being suggested. After all, these reflection sessions can contribute to the success of a project (McIntyre, 2008). Nevertheless, reflexivity should underpin the entire CBPR process.

Realizing and Overcoming Co-Construction

For planners, including those who employ a social constructionist lens, the challenge is to recognize that co-construction is something to realize, as well as overcome. When guided by community-based philosophy (Murphy, 2014a), the constructions of planners are not as important as those of a community. Therefore, planners must make a conscious effort to understand other viewpoints (Alvesson, 2002). Reflexivity is thus crucial for assisting planners in reading the story of a community, so that their constructions do not block, undermine, or obscure what the author is trying to convey. In this sense, reflexivity is critical for competent reading (Murphy, 1989).

Reflexive practice takes different forms and produces various outcomes (Reynolds & Vince, 2004). Fundamental to the type of reflection that is important for a community-based project is the self-interrogation of the mind (Kant, 1965) that leads an individual to recognize his or her own perspective on the world, and how this view may interfere with understanding those of others (Cunliffe & Easterby-Smith, 2004). The limits of a personal viewpoint are thus revealed and, in turn, the possibility is opened to overcome these boundaries in order to enter another perspective. Accordingly, a project may be envisioned in a variety of ways that were previously unimagined, ignored, or considered unfeasible.

When based on intersubjectivity, reflection leads to dialogue (Buber, 1970), which is the essence of reading. Specifically, persons begin with tentative understandings and interpretations, which become exposed to the critique of others. The limitations and possibilities of the original interpretations are then recognized. As a result, some understandings may fade in importance, others may be synthesized or expanded, or new ones may emerge (Gergen & Gergen, 1991). The meaning of a community's narrative is not found in the storylines, or in the reader, but through a dialogic process and is co-constituted.

Realizing the connection between reflexivity and interpersonal engagement is important, because dialogue ultimately enables the world of the author to be entered (Buber, 1970). For example, a planner, who is a medical doctor, may see the lack of healthcare available to a poor community as a sign that there needs to be a grassroots health clinic. Through conversation with community members, however, the planner learns that there is little interest in a clinic. Rather, the community desires a local daycare. Confused as to why the community does not see the construction of a clinic as a major priority and frustrated by the rejection of a seemingly good solution, the planner seeks guidance from a trusted community member. What is revealed through dialogue is how access to childcare would mean that mothers could contribute more effectively to the economic situation of their families and, thus, an everyday struggle could be alleviated. By engaging other viewpoints and recognizing the

limits of perspective, which in the planner's case are shaped by personal medical experience, the significance of a daycare could be understood. Therefore, the implication of a dialogical reading of a community's narrative is that a possibility is opened within an understanding of the local reality, so that new goals may be incorporated into a project.

Conclusion

The possibility of co-constructing knowledge in community-based projects is established philosophically by a community-based understanding of planning, which emphasizes solidarity and frames this activity to be communal (Butcher, 2007). As opposed to traditional approaches, there is never a point in community-based projects when planners should rely completely on their own perspective. While local knowledge is recognized to be vital to participatory research (Fals Borda, 1988), the claim that a project ought to be based on data that are "provided" by community members is misleading. Specifically, information is not something concrete that can be merely given to a planner, but instead is shared and interpreted through a process of co-construction.

Because everyone is always co-constructing (Steier, 1991), no-one has a privileged construction (Richard, 1993). The result is that an egalitarian basis is established and, in turn, certain constructions may arise in importance. With reflexivity, the usual concern with power is subdued. That is, while the interpretations and beliefs of persons who have controlled the group traditionally may be anticipated to dominate, reflexivity prevents those viewpoints from taking on a life of their own and becoming autonomous. Although their ideas may garner support, they will never be elevated automatically based on the idea that they are naturally best for the group (Lyotard, 1984).

Along these lines, no longer should the beliefs and opinions of community members be thought to be merely "incorporated" or "included" into a knowledge base, and made available for use by planners at their discretion. Because this information is weaved into the narrative of a community, planners must engage interpersonally in reading the collective story to understand accurately its contents. The purpose of a community-based project, nevertheless, is competent reading, which requires reflexivity that includes dialogue. The result is that knowledge may be co-constructed. Reading, in this way, is always co-creation.

Given the existential nature of planning, a community-based perspective elevates in importance the values of imagination and innovation (Murphy, 2014a). Key to competent reading, therefore, entails an appreciation of the creativity of the author. Not only do community members have the ability to make sense of their reality, but they have the reflective capacity to strategize according to their visions for a community. Through dialogue, knowledge constructions that are considered to be most important for the bond of community are kept at the forefront of the planning process, including any relevant input from planners. As a result, a community's intent supplies guidance for a project (Gómez & Sordé Marti, 2012).

References

- Alvesson, M. (2002). *Postmodernism and social research*. Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.
- American Public Health Association. (2009). *Support for community health workers to increase health access and to reduce health inequalities*. (Policy no. 20091). Washington, DC: APHA.
- Andharia, J., & Hardikar, N. (2012). Community organisation and community research: Women's struggle for food security in India. In L. Goodson & J. Phillimore (Eds.), *Community research for participation: From theory to method* (pp. 253-267). Chicago,

- IL: The Policy Press.
- Andrews, M., Squire, C., & Tamboukou, M. (2013). *Doing narrative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Antonacopoulou, E. P. (2004). The dynamics of reflexive practice: The relationship between learning and changing. In M. Reynolds & R. Vince (Eds.), *Organizing reflection* (pp. 47-64). Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company.
- Baker, E. A., & Motton, F. L. (2005). Creating understanding and action through group dialogue. In B. A. Israel, E. Eng, A. J. Schulz, & E. A. Parker (Eds.), *Methods in community-based participatory research for health* (pp. 307-325). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Barthes, R. (1977). *Image-music-text*. (S. Heath, Trans.). New York, NY: The Noonday Press.
- Barthes, R. (1985). *The grain of the voice*. New York, NY: Hill & Wang.
- Barthes, R. (1987). *Criticism and truth*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Behforouz, H. L., Farmer, P. E., & Mukherjee, J. S. (2004). From directly observed therapy to *accompagneurs*: Enhancing AIDS treatment outcomes in Haiti and in Boston. *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, 38(5), S429-S436.
- Bell, P., Addy, T., Madew, M., & Kainulainen, S. (2012). Universities as agents in the empowerment of local communities in Germany, Finland and Russia. In L. Goodson & J. Phillimore (Eds.), *Community research for participation: From theory to method* (pp. 89-104). Chicago, IL: The Policy Press.
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Brown, L., & Reitsma-Street, M. (2003). The values of community action research. *Canadian Social Work Review*, 20(1), 61-78.
- Buber, M. (1965). *The knowledge of man: Selected essays*. (M. Friedman & R. G. Smith, Trans.). New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers.
- Buber, M. (1970). *I and thou*. New York, NY: Scribner.
- Butcher, H. (2007). Towards a model of critical community practice. In H. Butcher, S. Banks, P. Henderson, & J. Robertson (Eds.), *Critical community practice* (pp. 51-76). Bristol, UK: The Policy Press.
- Butler, C. (2002). *Postmodernism: A very short introduction*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press Inc.
- Cartland, J., Ruch-Ross, H. S., & Mason, M. (2012). Engaging community researchers in evaluation: Looking at the experiences of community partners in school-based projects in the US. In L. Goodson & J. Phillimore (Eds.), *Community research for participation: From theory to method* (pp. 169-184). Chicago, IL: The Policy Press.
- Chilisa, B., & Chilisa, R. (2012). Community researchers in an adolescent risk reduction intervention in Botswana: Challenges and opportunities. In L. Goodson & J. Phillimore (Eds.), *Community research for participation: From theory to method* (pp. 269-282). Chicago, IL: The Policy Press.
- Cunliffe, A. L., & Easterby-Smith, M. (2004). From reflection to practical reflexivity: Experiential learning as lived experience. In M. Reynolds & R. Vince (Eds.), *Organizing reflection* (pp. 30-46). Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company.
- Day, G. (2006). *Community and everyday life*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Delanty, G. (1997). *Social science: Beyond constructivism and realism*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Delanty, G. (2010). *Community* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- de Man, P. (1979). *Allegories of reading*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1978). *Writing and difference*. (A. Bass, Trans.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

- Dussel, E., & Ibarra-Colado, E. (2006). Globalization, organization and the ethics of liberation. *Organization, 13*(4), 489-508.
- Eng, E., Moore, K. S., Rhodes, S. D., Griffith, D. M., Allison, L. L., Shirah, K., & Mebane, E. M. (2005). Insiders and outsiders assess who is 'The Community': Participant observation, key informant interview, focus group interview, and community forum. In B. A. Israel, E. Eng, A. J. Schulz, & E. A. Parker (Eds.), *Methods in community-based participatory research for health* (pp. 77-100). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Fals Borda, O. (1988). *Knowledge and people's power: Lessons with peasants in Nicaragua, Mexico and Colombia*. New York, NY: New Horizons Press.
- Foucault, M. (1977). What is an author? In M. Foucault (Ed.), *Language, counter-memory, practice: Selected essays and interviews* (pp. 113-138). (D. F. Bouchard & S. Simon, Trans.). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. (M. B. Ramos, Trans.). New York, NY: The Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Gadamer, H-G. (1975). *Truth and method*. (2nd ed.). (J. Weinsheimer & D. Marshall, Trans.). New York, NY: The Continuum Publishing Company.
- Gergen, K. J. (2009). *An invitation to social construction*. (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Gergen, K. J., & Gergen, M. M. (1991). Toward reflexive methodologies. In F. Steier (Ed.), *Research and reflexivity* (pp. 76-95). Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Giroux, H. A. (1995). Insurgent multiculturalism and the promise of pedagogy. In D. T. Goldberg (Ed.), *Multiculturalism: A critical reader* (pp. 325-343). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Gómez, A., & Sordé Marti, T. (2012). A critical communicative perspective on community research: Reflections on experiences of working with Roma in Spain. In L. Goodson & J. Phillimore (Eds.), *Community research for participation: From theory to method* (pp. 21-35). Chicago, IL: The Policy Press.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Habermas, J. (1970). Towards a theory of communicative competence. *Inquiry, 13*(1-4), 360-375.
- Hacker, K. (2013). *Community-based participatory research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Harris, S. R. (2010). *What is constructionism? Navigating its use in sociology*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time*. New York, NY: Harper and Row.
- Israel, B. A., Schulz, A. J., Parker, E. A., & Becker, A. B. (1998). Review of community-based research: Assessing partnership approaches to improve public health. *Annual Review of Public Health, 19*, 173-202.
- Kant, I. (1965). *Critique of pure reason*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.
- Kawulich, B., & Ogletree, T. (2012). Ethics in community research: Reflections from ethnographic research with First Nations People in the US. In L. Goodson & J. Phillimore (Eds.), *Community research for participation: From theory to method* (pp. 201-214). Chicago, IL: The Policy Press.
- Lyotard, J-F. (1984). *The postmodern condition*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- McIntyre, A. 2008. *Participatory action research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- McKenna, S. A., Iwasaki, P. G., Stewart, T., & Main, D. S. (2011). Key informants and community members in community-based participatory research: One is not like the

- other. *Progress in Community Health Partnerships: Research, Education, and Action*, 5(4), 387-397.
- McQuiston, C., Parrado, E. A., Olmos-Muñiz, J. C., & Bustillo Martinez, A. M. (2005). Community-based participatory research and ethnography. In B. A. Israel, E. Eng, A. J. Schulz, & E. A. Parker (Eds.), *Methods in community-based participatory research for health* (pp. 210-229). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Murphy, J. W. (1989). *Postmodern social analysis and criticism*. New York, NY: Greenwood Press.
- Murphy, J. W. (2012). *Contemporary social theory: Key themes and analysis*. New York, NY: Nova Science Publishers, Inc.
- Murphy, J. W. (2014a). *Community-based interventions: Philosophy and action*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Murphy, J. W. (2014b, October). *Primary health care and narrative*. Paper presented at Barry University, Miami Shores, FL.
- Murphy, J. W., & Callaghan, K. (1988). Postmodernism and social research: An application. *Social Epistemology*, 2(1), 83-91.
- Murphy, J. W., & Schlaerth, C. A. (2014a, March). *Emergence, construction, and authorial intent in community-based projects*. Paper presented at the Community Engagement Symposium, Miami Shores, FL.
- Murphy, J. W., & Schlaerth, C. A. (2014b). *Reflection: The key to meaningful social change in service-learning and community-based endeavors*. (Unpublished manuscript). Villanova, PA.
- Pedroni, T. C. (2006). Can the subaltern act? African American involvement in educational voucher plans. In M. W. Apple & K. L. Buras (Eds.), *The subaltern speak: Curriculum, power, and educational struggles* (pp. 95-117). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Reynolds, M., & Vince, R. (2004). *Organizing reflections*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company.
- Richard, N. (1993). Postmodernism and periphery. In T. Docherty (Ed.), *Postmodernism: A reader* (pp. 463-470). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Rigg, K. K., & Murphy, J. W. (2013). Storylines as a neglected tool for mental health service providers and researchers. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 11(4), 431-440.
- Rorty, R. (1979). *Philosophy and the mirror of nature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Rosenthal, E., Lee, J., Brownstein, N., Rush, C. H., Hirsch, G. R., Willaert, A. M., & Scott, J. (2010). Community health workers: Part of the solution. *Health Affairs*, 29(7), 1338-1342.
- Sartre, J.-P. (1976). *Critique of dialectical reason*. (Vol. 1.) (A. Sheridan-Smith, Trans.). London: NLB.
- Schutz, A. (1962). *Collected papers I: The problem of social reality*. The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Schutz, A., & Luckmann, T. (1973). *The structure of the life-world*. (Vol. 1.) (R. M. Zaner & H. T. Engelhardt, Jr., Trans.). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Spring, J. (2013). *Deculturalization and the struggle for equality: A brief history of the education of dominated cultures in the United States*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Squire, C., Andrews, M., & Tamboukou, M. (2013). Introduction: What is narrative research? In M. Andrews, C. Squire, & M. Tamboukou (Eds.), *Doing narrative research* (2nd ed., pp. 1-26). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Steier, F. (1991). Introduction: Research as self-reflexivity, self-reflexivity as social process. In F. Steier (Ed.), *Research and reflexivity* (pp. 1-11). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

- Therrien, W. J., & Kubina R. M., Jr. (2007). The importance of context in repeated reading. *Reading Improvement, 44*(4), 179-188.
- Trahar, S. (Ed.). (2013). *Contextualizing narrative inquiry: Developing methodological approaches for local contexts*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1958). *The blue and brown books*. New York, NY: Harper and Row.
- Yip Pui Lin, C. (2013). A conversation with Ah Leung. In S. Trahar (Ed.), *Contextualizing narrative inquiry: Developing methodological approaches for local contexts* (pp. 122-139). New York, NY: Routledge.

Author Note

Karie Jo Peralta, Ph.D. is Assistant Professor of Sociology in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at The University of Toledo, Toledo, OH. Her areas of interest are community-based research, race relations, and the sociology of education. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: karie.peralta@utoledo.edu.

John W. Murphy, Ph.D. is Professor of Sociology in the Department of Sociology at the University of Miami, Coral Gables, FL. His research interests are in community health and sociological theory.

Copyright 2016: Karie Jo Peralta, John W. Murphy, and Nova Southeastern University.

Article Citation

Peralta, K. J., & Murphy, J. W. (2016). Community-based participatory research and the co-construction of community knowledge. *The Qualitative Report, 21*(9), 1713-1726. Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol21/iss9/10>
