CHAPTER 1

Reading the Collection

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Participatory action research might be described as a broad church, movement, or family of activities. Each term is appropriate in its own way. The word *church* probably connotes community, solidarity, and commitment; all are necessary to carry the arguments to confront the psychologizing and sociologizing of research and method and their engagement with social life. The term *church* also invokes questions of ethics, morality, values, and interest that attend the research act, which is important. Participatory action research is also a 'movement' for reasons foreshadowed: it expresses a recognition that all research methodologies are implicitly political in character, defining a relationship of advantage and power between the researcher and the researched. What counts as research is not merely a matter of elegant argument about methodology; social research is also about the politics of having arguments heard, a precursor to their being understood and accepted. Because participatory action researchers sought to redefine the often privileged relation of the researcher to the researched, the vindication of participatory action research methodology required more than the validity of arguments to achieve acceptance by the research establishments it confronted and by the people it claimed to support. Describing participatory action research as a 'family' was suggested to me by Susan Noffke, a historian and an action researcher from the United States, for the humanistic and political reasons the term evokes.

The term *participatory action research* describes what I see as a convergence of traditions in certain kinds of action research and participatory research. The addition of the term *participatory* to action research is now necessary to distinguish authentic action research from the miscellaneous array of research types that fall under the descriptor 'action research' when data bases are surveyed. Those data bases show that the term *action research* is used to describe almost every research effort and method under the sun that attempts to inform action in some way. This might perhaps exclude linguistic analyses of ancient Etruscan funeral orations, but it gives little guidance about what

action research means in the terms intended by its originators, for whom participation—people doing research for themselves—was a *sine qua non* of action research.

Perhaps it is less necessary to add the word *action* to participatory research, because both definitionally and practically participatory research usually has been oriented to actions that people might take themselves to improve the conditions of their lives. Nevertheless, there are many extremely weak versions of 'participation' in research efforts that claim the name. Inserting the term *action* is important to the extent that it reminds people that it is participants' own activities which are meant to be informed by the ongoing inquiry, not merely the future research directions of external researchers. For several reasons, including perhaps the somewhat ambiguous one of legitimation, there has been considerable willingness in the participatory research movement to recognize the commonality of interest between participatory researchers and action researchers.

The collection of essays presented in this book illustrates some of the commonalities and differences between the theories, practices, and forms of organization of participatory action research in different countries. When I asked authors to contribute, I was explicit about inviting them to tell their stories of action research in their own ways. I want also to be explicit here regarding how I asked authors to contribute to the collection, how I saw it shaping up, and, in keeping with the aspirations of action research itself, how I documented my own work while trying to ensure that contributors wrote in terms of their own experience, but with a collective as well as an individual purpose.

Inviting Participants

I circulated a paper with the title "Principles for Participatory Action Research" with the invitations to contribute so people knew my thoughts regarding participatory action research. An edited version of that paper is included as chapter 2. I said then:

> I send it not to *prescribe* the nature of participatory action research, but to let contributors know what I think, and to give all authors a common point of reference. . . But again, I do not want to steer too much what contributors think it important to say.

I explained that the purpose of the collection was to document the nature of participatory action research in a variety of historical, political, and cultural contexts. It was obviously possible to write a whole book about *each*

of these three influences on participatory action research, so authors were invited to select key aspects and place appropriate emphasis on history, politics, and culture for their own cases.

The Suggested Thematic Guidelines

I knew that contributions would range across several different substantive fields of inquiry and endeavor, as well as across widely differing contexts, and that this would create an issue of the conceptual unity of the collection. I suggested guidelines that I thought were directed at achieving that unity without stifling the creative hand of the contributors. I thought it absolutely important that the guidelines were not slavishly followed, and said so. Some of my suggestions were simply practical precautions for clarity, but, largely, they expressed thematic concerns that papers might approach, perhaps even in quite oblique ways.

Substantive fields of inquiry. By this, I meant fields such as agriculture, education, social work, health, and so on. Authors were invited to refer to one or any combination of these fields, perhaps reflecting on why each field was chosen and why it became important in the development of thinking about participatory action research. The relationships between fields were potentially important. I suggested, for example, that the question Why is participatory action research more difficult to get started in schools than it is in social work programs? be posed.

Political aspects. I knew these might be thought about in several different ways, but that the nature and role of the state is likely to be important. For example, in Nicaragua, where the Sandinista government sponsored a massive literacy campaign using participatory action research methods, the minister responsible for community development summarized the government policy in these terms: "In Nicaragua, the state is the precious instrument of community." Such a policy is obviously compatible with the principles of participatory action research, but how does it contrast with state interventions which insist, for example, on standardization of social programs across communities? In Australian education, moves (or rhetoric) to reinstate the role of local communities in influencing the curriculum have been confronted with contradictory efforts by the state to closely monitor student, teacher, and school achievement.

I thought it important not to restrict political discussion to the role of the state; power is relevant in all relationships, language, and practices. It creates the structures by which 'fields' are formed, governed, and understood. How

does the exercise of power (blatant or subtle, micro, meso, or macro, direct or hegemonic) affect the way participatory action research is received, practiced, and understood in the 'institutions' under consideration? What are the relationships between the traditional research community (or other kinds of institutions) and social movements? What is the relationship between the individual and the state, the researcher and the researched, the person and the culture? What is the standing of participatory action research and of 'emancipatory' and 'advocacy' research generally? How is the ordinary knowledge and practice of everyday life respected? In short, I thought it would help if contributors were able to think about the politics (and ideology) of the state, the disciplines (and their methodological preferences), other institutions, and the relationships of action researching groups and individuals with and within each of these.

Cultural aspects. I encouraged authors to consider these at different levels. How does participatory action research compare with people's 'ordinary' ways of doing things? Are institutions always hierarchical, and is participatory action research always oppositional? Do religious practices nurture an interest in self-reflection? Is reflection an individualistic, introspective activity, for example, or is reflection interpreted and practiced in ways oriented more toward collective action? Do people typically link their circumstances to historical and material analytical concepts such as class, race, and gender? Is this context cross-cultural, and are people coming to terms with ideas like 'colonization'? What role do the arts play in expressing the plight of oppressed people, in educating them, and in supporting (even creating) their moves to change their circumstances?

What is the nature of the culture of the institutions people work in or with? Are they bureaucratic? How do people cope with them? What is the status of people's knowledge (popular knowledge, craft knowledge) in different kinds of institutions? To whom do people regard themselves as attached, accountable? Are people (and institutions and groups) caring, competitive, or collaborative? What is the culture of the groups people work with? For example, are people mutually warm and respectful as a matter of course? Do people talk about power and its abuses in interpersonal as well as institutional relationships? Do work relationships spill over into social activities and commitments to the same kinds of social movements?

Of course, these were all *my* particular suggestions and questions, invented with very little, if any, knowledge of other people's concerns in the contexts in which they were working. But I thought authors would probably recognize some themes which they might agree were common to much of the debate about participatory action research. Nevertheless, if authors thought other themes were important, I invited them to identify and use them in their discussions.

Discourses, Practices and Power

In suggesting the aforementioned sections, I felt I had emphasized the development of 'thinking' about participatory action research, disclosing my own predilection (and failing) for thinking about discourses. I also drew authors' attention again to three important aspects: language use, ordinary activities, and the social relationships which contend with each other in the formation of individual identity, institutional cultures, and the culture of society more generally. I said all authors should consider the question: "What has *changed* as a result of the commitment to participatory action research in this context?"

I thought it important that the collection provide four things for its audience:

1. Access to the literature which informs particular kinds of participatory action research—thus influential theorists and practitioners and their key works are identified in their appropriate historical place.
2. Reference to the kind of literature which informed the political and cultural discussion engaged by influential participatory action researchers.
3. Access and reference, where possible, to examples of participatory action research in the context being discussed.
4. An educative vision for the future(s) of participatory action research—how to understand the influences documented so the theory and practice of participatory action research are wiser in the future.

What styles did I expect the authors would use? That depended somewhat upon the nature of their own experiences. All contributors are experienced participatory action researchers themselves and wrote in various ways from their own informed, personal perspectives. Some contributors have been key players in the development of participatory action research in their own contexts and wrote biographically and historically. More recent entrants to the field are prominent students, as well as practitioners, of action research and draw on that balance of experience.

Key Emergent Themes

In these texts, there are both common themes and themes which cause the stories and accounts to differ.

Common Themes

Participation. Every author assumes that participatory action research is research done by the people for themselves: "Learning to do it by doing it"

in Paulo Freire's phrase. Authentic participation in research means sharing in the way research is conceptualized, practiced, and brought to bear on the life-world. It means ownership: responsible agency in the production of knowledge and the improvement of practice. Mere involvement implies none of this, and creates the risk of co-option and exploitation of people in the realization of the plans of others. This is common in community programs that are portrayed as participatory action research but that in reality are little more than manipulation in the oppressive and unreflective implementation of some institutional or government policy. People often are involved in research, but rarely are they participants who have real ownership of research theory and practice as they do here.

Tandon's reference to control over 'the whole process' means that even the research methodology itself may be reinterpreted and reconstituted by participants. The interpretations of participatory action research presented here express that commitment.

Reflection as collective critique. The participatory action research portrayed in this book anticipates collective reflection on practice, relationships with others, and the way in which forms of life are conceptualized. The ways in which experience is objectified and subjectivity is disciplined may vary, but there is a commitment to use examined experience of concrete practice to inform future action. Each author recognizes that participatory action research is a collective activity. Three key reasons are implicit. The interpretation of experience is more trustworthy if others help; trying to change things impacts on others, and their consent and help is needed; change is political and social life is manifold, not broken into bits that can be changed one at a time: Individuals cannot accomplish change of much note by themselves, and they cannot change anything unless they change themselves at the same time.

Communitarian politics. Participatory action research expresses an explicit politics. It is not simply about change, but about change of a particular kind. Each of the themes discussed previously indicates that this form of research aspires to communitarian and egalitarian politics: people working together toward rationality, justice, coherence, and satisfactoriness in workplaces and in other areas of people's lives. However, it is a serious confusion about the nature of participatory action research to think that it is something that only 'practitioners' do. Both the politics and epistemology of participatory action research require broad participation; it must not be confused with 'political activism' or 'oppositional politics' among the less powerful, the poor, or the disenfranchised. Participatory action research is an obligation undertaken by all people at all levels and in all kinds of institutions who seek to develop the quality of their work and the symmetry and reciprocity of their relationships with others.

Participatory action research is political because it is about people changing themselves and their circumstances and about informing this change as it happens, but it is no more political than any other kind of research. The difference is that the politics of other kinds of research are undeclared and submerged under the spurious guises of 'objectivity' (rather than disciplined subjectivity), 'detachment' (rather than expressing a defensible human interest), and 'value-free' (rather than expressive of particular values in concrete research situations).

Research. Participatory action research *is* research, not just political activism or oppositional politics. Sometimes people's efforts to objectify their own experiences lead them to try to regain control over their work and lives. This is sometimes interpreted as mere politics by critics, especially those who have an interest in other forms of social organization, other ways of producing knowledge about the world, and other ways of acting *in* and *on* the social world. It is true that participatory action research occurs sometimes in contexts where political activism and oppositional politics are in evidence, but it is important for everyone, critics and advocates alike, that these are not seen as the same thing. Critics typically show a profound ignorance of the extensive methodological literature of participatory action research and the convergence of old intellectual traditions and new forms of discourse that both vindicate and inform it: Aristotelian ethics, dialectical materialism, participatory research and action research themselves, phenomenology, ethnography, symbolic interactionism, several different feminisms, post-colonialism, and some forms of post-modernism. Explicitly and implicitly, these essays show unambiguously that participatory action research is about the conscientious objectification of concrete experience and change. Some critics of participatory action research may want to ask whether it is really research or not; that is a perfectly legitimate question. What cannot be denied is the legitimacy of the affirmative answer. The literature of participatory action research and of concrete practices demonstrably informed by participatory action research show that it produces new insights and understandings that meet defensible standards for knowledge claims.

Themes of Difference

Differences among the papers show that the ideas about participatory action research evolved, advanced, and receded as participatory action research was shaped and reshaped by its proponents in their own contexts in response to local historical circumstances.

Institutions. An interesting location of difference is the role played by 'institutions.' At first glance, work under the rubric of 'action research'

roughly corresponds with formal institutions such as universities. Participatory research can similarly be seen to correspond with informal 'community' efforts at development and change. However, these correspondences are soon complicated. We find that the first versions of action research in Western cultures have their roots in community development programs, and though it is seldom acknowledged, in feminist approaches to community activism. In turn, some more recent versions of participatory research have their practitioners advocating support from the universities, seeking substantive support, methodological legitimation, and political vindication. Proponents of both family branches now seem to find strengths in one another's theory, forms of organization, and practice. Perhaps this merely evidences an emergent understanding of the nature of social change, prefigured in the literature of 'innovation' that interpreted social and educational reforms in the United States in the 1960s. That literature indicates that in 'loosely coupled' systems, any group of participants in an innovation can exercise a 'right of veto' of its diffusion. This effect can be achieved by active resistance by people, by renaming what they already do or, more usually, by simply continuing on as before as if nothing had changed.

Although we need a broader concept than 'innovation' to embrace our concerns here—perhaps 'social change' is a better concept—we now know how broadly based and understood change must be if it is to last. That is, coalitions that represent support in different ways and at many levels in communities and institutions (public and private) will be necessary to change conditions and supplant practices that maintain irrationality, injustice, and incoherent and unsatisfying forms of existence.

The state. Much of what has been said about institutions obviously applies to the state as well, since public institutions at least sometimes function instrumentally in realizing policies formulated by the state. But in the writings in this collection there is an ambivalence about the role of the state with respect to participatory action research. In some nations, communitarian political aspirations expressed by the state were important in creating conditions supportive of participatory action research; in other nations, the state merely co-opted the language for its own purposes and left aside the forms of practice, social relationships, and organization that constitute authentic participatory action research.

Ontology and epistemology. Despite the considerable commonality evident in aspiration and method expressed in this collection, the papers here are grounded in several different ways of understanding reality. Implicit, and sometimes explicit, appeal is made to Aristotelian ethics, critical social science, Deweyian philosophy, feminism, Buddhism, popular knowledge, and

perhaps others I have missed. Of course, each of these approaches embodies and anticipates different ways of working and of articulating the rationale for educational and social work of many kinds. But it is obvious also that these authors do see themselves as sharing a common agenda. How is *any* commonality possible from such disparate sources? I think perhaps there are two fundamental ways of answering the question. The first takes into account the view of social change intimated above. The proliferation of discourses of participatory action research is in one sense strategic, simply reflecting the different social (and linguistic) contexts in which the struggle for rationality, justice, and coherent and satisfying forms of life is engaged. The obvious fact that different authors have a different sense of audience reflects in part their actual if not their preferred location in that complex of struggles. The second reason engages the substance of the first—in the concrete situation, people of many different persuasions can come to agreement about fundamental aspirations for humanity. People cannot always see the same light on the hill, nor seek to wander the same Utopia, but can recognize starving and abused children, exploited workers, and victimized women—and know with whom to work to improve things. It is their understandings and aspirations we must heed, engage, and support.

Submerged Themes

Culture. In spite of my initial encouragement that writers might attend to the influence of local culture on the nature of participatory action research theory and practice, this does not appear as a strong theme in any of these chapters. This is a puzzle. My first reaction was to think this was due to the nature of culture itself: It is in a sense just what Illinois professor Harry Broudy casually remarked, that culture is "what goes without saying." However, I fear this reaction is a little too easy here. I suspect cultural difference is less of an issue than the sociopolitical context—in the experience of these authors. Why have contributors not attended to 'culture' explicitly in their chapters? We may speculate on their reasons, and I found that in the surfeit of contributors' commentaries it was difficult to give an overview, especially regarding cultural contexts with which I was not familiar. For example, to write about 'Australian culture' is fraught with difficulty. Pluralizing to 'Australian cultures' helps, but not much.

Nevertheless, it is clear that some influences of culture (s) are relevant at institutional and societal levels. The diversity of writing genre in the collection shows the difference in institutional and community cultural contexts. I shall say a little more about that after I address some issues that emerge in conducting participatory action research in cross-cultural settings, issues that are somewhat latent in the collection.

My own experience in working cross-culturally, for example, with Aboriginal people is that it is difficult to comprehend how participatory action research is reinterpreted in another cultural context. We said what we thought it was, invited reinterpretation, expected some 'back translation,' but generally could not work out what the method really looked like in Yolngu Matha (the language of the people we worked with), or indeed in Aboriginal social practice. Our advocacies seemed consonant with the ways in which Aboriginal people work through issues and plans in their communities, but perhaps detailed understanding is just another colonialist aspiration. In general, I think this is also the case with interpretation into the Thai language, as the following anecdote indicates.

During 1991, Dr. Kowit Pravalpruk of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development of the Thailand Ministry of Education wrote to Deakin University Press requesting permission to translate into the Thai language *The action research planner*, developed by Stephen Kemmis, myself, and others (Kemmis and McTaggart 1988a, 1988b).

We were concerned about literal translation, knowing that the principles of action research might best be expressed in different ways in other languages and in different cultural contexts. Our concern was fed by the number of requests that arrived to reproduce the 'diagrams' of action research in *The planner*, which we feared had come to stand for the idea of action research at the expense of the principles and theory of its use explained in the text itself and in several other publications (Carr and Kemmis 1986; Kemmis and McTaggart 1998a, 1998b; McTaggart 1991a). We had long been concerned about the reduction of action research to its 'iconic simplicity' (McTaggart and Garbutcheon-Singh 1986) and had encouraged people to reinterpret action research in ways that took into account their own discoveries about action research practice and the institutional and social contexts in which it was being tried (McTaggart 1991b, 1991c, 1993).

We thought it might be helpful to the Thai translator, Dr. Sor Wasana Pravalpruk of Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok, for us to conduct some action research workshops in Bangkok. But most especially we thought it essential to seek the help of Dr. Arphorn Chuaprapaisilp (see her paper in this collection) of Prince of Songkla University who had a rich experience of the practice of action research in Thailand. We did that, and after conducting a workshop at Srinakharinwirot University, Dr. Arphorn, Dr. Sor Wasana, and a professor of English from Srinakharinwirot were working on the first completed draft of the translation.

The conversation was mostly in Thai, but occasionally I was asked a question about *The planner*, often causing me to recognize that Stephen Kemmis and I could do a lot to improve the clarity of our writing. Of course, being monolingual in itself is something most of us would do well to feel quite

ashamed about. Nevertheless, the laughter and warmth of the meeting put me at ease, despite my stomach upset from overindulgence the day before on a grand tour through Kanchanaburi province to celebrate the king's birthday with my hosts. One question I remember regarded the particular sense in which we were using the term *discourse*. I will not reiterate my answer, lest my ineptitude become too obvious. The conversation continued in Thai, and then Arphorn asked me another question, which seemed to invite an even more elaborate answer that I proceeded to give. As I was warming up, Arphorn politely beckoned me to stop. She said:

> There is no need to explain, Robin. The problem we have here is one you cannot help us with. We understand *perfectly* what the details of action research mean in English; what I am afraid we cannot do at the moment is to translate them into Thai.

Despite such difficulties, it is worth making some observations about culture that might serve to present a perspective on at least some of the papers. These observations are not argued here and may be too sweeping, but are proffered in the hope of provoking thought.

Perhaps some key questions concern what the papers might tell us about the *research* culture of social inquiry. The Austrian, Australian, British, U.S., and Spanish papers manifest highly institutionalized research cultures. A key divergence between the Austrian, Spanish, and Australian perspectives and the others may be the role that critical theory has played in intellectual life in the research establishment. The history of action research (McTaggart 1991b) in the United States shows that it was pushed aside by a dominant positivist research ideology. That was not so easy in Europe, where strong traditions of critique existed. In Britain, Aristotelian modes of thought find expression in a strong interpretivist tradition that has mitigated the 'can do' social engineering impetus of U.S. research culture. Skepticism (to put it rather gently) about German intellectual traditions in the United Kingdom made for a more practical and liberal humanist approach to social inquiry.

In the United States, the culture that spawned McCarthyism may have obliterated the broad left hegemony necessary to hold out the colonization of social inquiry by the natural scientific method. Of course, there was always some resistance, and recent expressions of this struggle include advocacies about the validity of narrative accounts of personal experience as a defensible knowledge form. The Schubert paper is one such expression, although note that its continuity is with the work of John Dewey. Critique in the European sense is less evident. Note also that these debates rage *in* the academy as well, expressing the powerful emergence of the politics of 'difference,' main currents in feminist post-structuralism and post-colonialism in particular. These

debates have created space for narrative approaches to reporting educational experience, but their relationship with bodies of theory remain unclear and often unexpressed. Educators' stories and indeed their work itself are important and can be disciplined by critique, but there is a case yet to be made that they are always sufficiently disciplined to be regarded as research. What, for example, are the criteria or principles, however contestable they might be, against which explicit or implicit knowledge claims might be considered or assessed?

The impetus of Thai culture is expressed primarily in Arphorn Chuaprapaisilp's chapter through her reference to Buddhism. Her study is influenced by Western institutional culture in a rather direct way: she wrote in part for her dissertation committee. One effect of that is to require the author to exercise a strong hand in reporting. This institutional imperative exerts an effect on the paper, possibly making it seem less self-reflective, more individualistic, and less attentive to problematizing the relationship between researcher and researched than participatory action research reports are now expected to be. Perhaps the paper's style could be viewed from another perspective. The often reported hierarchies in Thai (and indeed most Asian) institutions could influence action research practice because symmetry of power relations and reciprocity among participants is more difficult to achieve. However, the intensity of these hierarchies may be in the imaginings of the westerners who observe them, westerners who are all too oblivious to the silent hegemonies that discipline their own lives (such as the social rules that stop them from inviting their own vice-chancellors for a barbecue).

Papers describing participatory action research conducted in community rather than institutional contexts express something of the culture of oppositional work. There is delight that the academy is finally taking notice, an intimacy of relations at a personal level, and a concern to communicate. There also is a complexity of relations at the political level, and in the case of Venezuela and New Caledonia, an almost overwhelming concern with politics of organizations, nongovernment organizations, projects, and communities. This is not easily explained simply as the preoccupation of the authors. Rather, these things seem to me to be closely related. The working lives of participatory action researchers in developing countries are more personal and contingent upon the politics of relations among formal and informal groups. Perhaps what we see here is the limited reach of the nation state and the effects of the other institutions and activities which substitute for it. The detail provided indicates the importance of detail itself in these difficult situations. The culture of groups is both constituted by, and helps to constitute, the broader and tumultuous culture of the nation itself. There may be more detail in some chapters than some readers will relish, but the detail does not matter as much as knowing it is there.

Perhaps these rather speculative comments about culture are sufficient to orient readers to the difficulties of describing its influence. May I remind those who think I have gone too far in my attributions that that is the very problem I pointed out initially. One risks being provocative.

Method. This is not a book about the method or methodology of participatory action research. There are many such expositions as the bibliographies of the contributors show, but my introductory paper, which comprises the next chapter, is intended to indicate something of the methodological commitments of participatory action researchers. Contributors assumed that this paper would appear alongside theirs, and I believe these principles are widely accepted among participatory action researchers. Those seeking more technical accounts of method may be frustrated here. They may be even more frustrated by my further observation that authentic participation itself might almost be seen as *constituting* the method. Others are more wary and, for this reason, if not to assuage any of my own vestigial doubts, I should say something about the validation of knowledge claims in participatory action research. I expect that there will be different emphases among these validation approaches with the different contributions, but at the same time, I would not expect too much dissent from their underlying intent.

Validation in participatory action research is accomplished by a variety of methods, particularly those reported in methodological literature of interpretive inquiry and including the triangulation of observations and interpretations, by establishing credibility among participants and informants, by participant confirmation, by the deliberate establishment of an 'audit trail' of data and interpretations, and by testing the coherence of arguments being presented in a 'critical community' or a community of 'critical friends' whose commitment is to testing the arguments and evidence advanced in the account of the study. This is typically an extended process of iteration between the data, the literature which informs the study (substantively and methodologically), participants in the study, and critical friends and others who have an informed interest in the study. That is, validation is an explicit process of dialogue, it is not achieved by adherence to a fixed procedure. Validation in participatory action research can only be achieved if there are appropriate communicative structures in place throughout the research and action that allow participants to continue to associate and identify with the work of the collective project of change. I have identified elsewhere (McTaggart in press) some criteria for considering the validity of action research *reporting*, and although the papers in this collection are not all action reports as such, the following criteria are a useful point of reference to augment the methodological principles outlined in the next chapter. These criteria provide quite a stiff test, but do give a strong sense of the kinds of information gathered and the stance taken:

- explicit recognition that the account presented is just one among several defensible accounts that might be presented;
- presentation of, and attention to, the voices and views of participants, including their differences and agreements;
- careful attention to ensure that otherwise unheard voices (for example, disenfranchised groups) are given expression;
- explicit theoretical effort to comprehend the ways in which participants have come to describe their life-worlds, engage it with others, and enact their work practices, for example, through processes of deconstruction and ideology critique;
- demonstrated cognizance of the relevant substantive and methodological literature and the ways in which these frame both questions and practices;
- explicit iteration between the data, literature, and practical and interpretive activities of the researchers;
- questioning within the study about the ways in which both the research question and the methodology used are framed by the relationship between the researcher/author and his or her institutional obligations (for example, as a doctoral student); and
- deliberate attention to the planned (and incidental) reflexivity of the study, its catalytic effect on change and improvement, through intermediate reporting to its audiences, and through the relationship between the researcher (s) and others whose work is reported (or otherwise affected).

Although we add moral and ethical content here to the criteria by which research should be judged, it is important to remember that in conventional research literatures (and everyday usage) validity is a property of *inferences*, not of research or research design per se (House, Mathison, and McTaggart 1989). That is, validity is a property of the interpretations and conclusions which people make of information and the theoretical frameworks which guide its collection and use. In participatory action research, these are inferences which are drawn by others as well as the researcher, and the representation of any study typically should be quite rich with voices and observations to help readers come to their own conclusions or generate their own 'readings' (Lather 1993). By picking up some of the currents in the post-structuralist debates to affirm the possibility of multiple readings and the deliberate reflexivity of social inquiry, I argue along with Lather (1993) that there is a need to go beyond the views of validity expressed and implicit in the traditional conceptualizations of validity, for example, in Guba and Lincoln (1985), Yin (1989), and Wolcott (1992).

These commitments to validation might be used as point of reference in considering the papers. But do keep in mind that the notion of the surety of method is contested terrain in this literature.

The Papers

There are noticeable differences in the discursive genre of the papers in this collection. This is partly an accident of selection, itself a fortuitous accident of the acquaintances one makes (or acquaintances of acquaintances one discovers) in international participatory action research networks. However, the differences themselves are important signifiers. They reflect the nature of people's institutional and community affiliations, the diversity of audiences they anticipate, the linguistic communities they work in and, more generally, the breadth of activities identifiable as participatory action research. The order of papers is a bit intuitive. I have put first the papers which I think have more evident aspirations to inform a general 'theory of action research,' despite their obvious 'local' identifications. As I have already indicated, my own chapter, "Guiding Principles for Participatory Action Research," is included as a point of reference for readers as it was for those invited to contribute (see also McTaggart 1991a).

Herbert Altrichter and Peter Gstettner, once colleagues at the University of Klagenfurt, Austria, and now professors of the universities of Innsbruck and Klagenfurt, respectively, present a short history of action research in German language contexts. Altrichter writes as an experienced teacher educator with close knowledge of English and Australian participatory action research traditions. His interests include school development, educators' theories of action, and action research methodology, and he has published in both German and English in these areas. Gstettner comes to participatory action research with an interest in the history and psychology of childhood, and of direct relevance here, a perspective informed by ethnomethodology and issues to do with cross-cultural teaching and research, and problems faced by learners of ethnic and linguistic minorities. Theirs is a particularly salient history because it recovers the roots of the influential Lewinian conceptualization of action research in participatory community movements. Their critiques of action research theory and practice introduce some key issues evident in histories of action research (McTaggart 1991b; Noffke 1989, 1990): criticisms from reconstructed and unreconstructed positivists, issues about the methodology and its theoretical justification, issues about the relationship between researcher and researched (the problem of 'participation'), confusion with political activism, and internal disagreements about the appropriate nature of action research, and just how to establish action research practice.

The co-option of action research in an ideology of managerialism forms a key theme in Clem Adelman's chapter. With John Elliott, Adelman was initiator of the well-known Ford Teaching Project which remains one of the best exemplars of action research in education. Adelman is now a Professor in the

Faculty of Education and Community Studies in the University of Reading in England. Reaffirming the democratic and participatory impulse of action research, he presents an interesting account of the relationship between the assumptions of the British Humanities Curriculum Project and the action research of the Ford Teaching Project, still perhaps the most thoughtfully documented example of British action research. Interestingly, Adelman's analysis confirms a theme that underpins the whole collection: a need to converge the rather better-supported and researched individualistic versions of action research that characterize the staff development genre and democratic practices exemplified in the participatory research movement.

Orlando Fals Borda's life and career traverse a moral course that took him away from a prestigious position at the National University of Colombia to work for twenty years with peasants who were denied the agricultural land necessary for their survival. We can find no better expression of the failings of formal institutions to engage matters of social justice. For Fals Borda, participation in knowledge production is an essential concomitant of participation in the movement to achieve social justice, for people to become "free from blood and horror." For those who fear that participatory action research is part of some Marxist imperialistic plot to imbue people with a "science of the proletariat," he has this advice: Even if the fear was justified, people do not fall for it. Only through recovering their own histories, and indeed by reinterpreting their own versions of participatory action research, can people form an educational and political praxis that justifies their commitment. Although Fals Borda is modest about his achievements, attributing them to democratic methods of inquiry, ideas, and practices, it will help readers to know that he was again professor and emeritus professor of the National University of Colombia, was a member of the Colombian Constituent Assembly (parliament), worked on a new democratic Colombian constitution, and chaired two national commissions, one negotiating Colombian off-shore oil rights with Venezuela, the other designing land reform and electoral boundary reform for the whole country. A modest voice of the people has become an important voice of a nation, but Fals Borda would prefer to say that Colombians have demonstrated that a participatory action research movement can play a key part in transforming a nation.

The next paper was written by Anil Chaudhary who presently works at the Popular Education and Action Centre in New Delhi. When I first met him at the World Congress on Participatory Research in Managua Nicaragua in 1991, he was Joint Coordinator of the Society for Participatory Research in Asia. His paper is one of a pair sent to me by Suneeta Dhar. The second paper by Srilatha Batliwala and Sheela Patel of the Society for Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC) in Bombay appears later in the collection and exemplifies some of the commitments of Chaudhary's short 'position' paper. I

have separated them in the collection because of the gentle organizing principle I have followed, but it also makes sense to read them together, because one establishes principles and the other is a 'case' exemplifying them. Chaudhary joins Rajesh Tandon in attempting to articulate an alternative and distinctive epistemology for participatory research that gives due recognition to popular knowledge, but with an eye to the international machinations of transnational corporate capitalism, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund.

Shirley Grundy's historical account of Australian action research reflects the intersection of state initiative and personal biography. Grundy was a key advocate for participatory action research in Western Australia and worked closely with Stephen Kemmis of the Deakin University Action Research Group in the early 1980s. She is currently Associate Professor of Education at Murdoch University in Western Australia and played a key role in the National Innovative Links Project which sponsored close relations between teacher educators, educational researchers, teachers, principals, and consultants in the early 1990s. Her analysis of the different venues of advocacy for Australian action research shows a somewhat more communitarian ideology permeated that work, strengthened over the decade or so of her analysis. She describes the emergence of the debate about an appropriate epistemology for action research and an attendant concern for authentic collaboration and participation. This move explicitly contested the co-option of action research as a technology of reform and gave Australian action research a distinctive critical character informed by opposition to action research in the United States, an empathy with the Aristotelian 'practical' tradition, and identification with German and Habermasian social science.

John Dinan and Yuraima Garcia describe the emergence and potential of participatory action research in Venezuela as its economy and politics are transformed before, during, and after an oil boom. Dinan graduated from the London University Institute of Education, and has lived in South America since 1972. At the time of writing, he was Projects Director and Consultant to the Institute for Educational Consultancy (INDASE) in Caracas, Venezuela. He is a founding member of the Centre for Experimentation in Life-Long Learning (CEPAP) of the Simon Rodriguez University in Caracas, and also of the Venezuelan Participatory Network. Garcia is a Venezuelan sociologist with expertise in the planning, coordination, and research of rural development programs in Venezuela. This chapter documents a successful collaboration. The complexity of their analysis reflects another theme of the collection: changing forms of social life involves a myriad of conditions, only some of which nurture community initiatives. The number of organizations referred to alone evidences that complexity. The issues identified for Venezuela by Dinan and Garcia perhaps encapsulate key issues for the theory, organization, and practice of participatory action research worldwide. They include:

- lack of communication among participatory action researchers, including the problem of too little documentation or reports being lost as 'fugitive' literature in mimeo and other less formal production (the informality of which has some advantages);
- weak reconciliation between theoretical and justificatory work and the studies of concrete cases;
- differences within the field which help to articulate and strengthen the justifications and strategies available to people, but which at the same time can weaken the reputation of participatory action research by detracting from its agreed fundamental commitments and principles and creating the appearance of confusion and disunity;
- difficulties for people with similar substantive concerns but different institutional affiliations to work together; and
- inadequate arrangements for work-site based education about the theory, organization, and practice of participatory action research among newcomers to the field and among experienced workers (in the field and in academe).

Maria Saez Brezmes is a science educator from the Department of Cellular Biology and Pharmacology at the University of Valladolid in Spain and consultant to OECD-CERI on science education. She has had close connections with the Centre for Applied Research in Education (CARE) at the University of East Anglia in England over the past decade because of her interests in qualitative methods and political analysis. She is a specialist in case study and democratic approaches to evaluation and a leading practitioner and theorist of evaluation in Spain. Her association with CARE and with John Elliott simulated her interest in participatory action research. She focuses on the decade of reform in Spain from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s. An even more profound national political transformation provides the context of her analysis. The demise of a dictatorship, increasing economic and cultural contact with the European community, and the emergence of a decentralized democratic state composed of several 'autonomous communities' provided a context, at least in principle, nurturant of the fundamental aspirations of participatory action research. Efforts to sponsor action research in Spain raise important issues about the meaning of 'participation.' Teacher representation on innovation committees is not enough, and whole school change is apparently a precursor to individual teacher development. At another level, the traditional role of the universities in dominating and defining legitimate knowledge production remains an issue, as does the teaching profession's sense of itself as a legitimate career. Influenced by British action research especially but also by the German and Australian traditions, Spain provides an interesting site for studying the contestation between participatory action research and the vestiges of central curriculum and teacher control in the form of inspection and national assessment obligations.

Bill Schubert and Ann Lopez-Schubert of the University of Illinois in Chicago write about participatory action research from highly developed perspectives. He is Professor of Education and Chair of the Area of Curriculum, Instruction, and Evaluation. A former elementary school teacher, he has published widely on curriculum theory and history, the nature of educational inquiry, teacher and student lore, democratic involvement of teachers and learners in curriculum through action research, and the implicit curriculum assumptions in non-school learning environments. Ann Lopez-Schubert, also an academic, teaches in the elementary education program at the university and is herself a former elementary teacher and teacher of English as a Second Language in inner city schools in Chicago. Her publications include teaching and the arts, non-school learning, home education, curriculum theory and history, alternative paradigms of inquiry, and action research that involves teacher and learner collaboration. They present a view of action research which at first acquaintance seems much less methodological in its discursive form and much more firmly located in the day-to-day life of a working professional. There are dangers of misinterpretation here: action researchers are insistent upon regular and somewhat systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. That is, action research does involve doing a little more than people ordinarily do, except perhaps the most conscientiously and explicitly self-reflective workers. These authors, too, reassert the links between democratic movements and the idea of participatory action research. But in the United States, perhaps even more so than elsewhere, the not-so-invisible hand of the marketplace confronts the Deweyian tradition of action research. Teachers feel themselves compulsorily deskilled as they are forced to respond to the reductions of the meaning of education implicit in transnational corporate capitalist ideology and its peculiarly U.S. expression, the corporate marketing of educational testing. Perhaps changing this is more than participatory action research can do alone, and it is worth remembering that all good things in the world are not participatory action research. But these authors inform and strengthen the view that, in the United States, participatory action research will play an essential role in the struggle for changing the fundamental practices of Westernism itself.

Jean Delion describes his work in agricultural extension in New Caledonia. Delion draws on his extensive experience in participatory action research in a variety of cross-cultural settings, especially in the South Pacific, but also in Southeast Asia and francophone Africa. He was born in Madagascar, but took out a PhD at Sorbonne University. I tracked him down first in Yaounde, Cameroon, but subsequently communicated with him in Bressuire, France and later in Vientiane, Laos. His work was drawn to my attention by Richard Morse, then Director of the East West Center in Hawaii, where he had done some writing on pedagogy and participation in rural development. His

account revisits the issue of participation, drawing special attention to the way in which close association with disenfranchised people can be interpreted by those with power. The attribution of 'political activist' (and, therefore, undesirable person) can be made, conveniently, even if not justifiably, by those threatened by communities coming to understand their circumstances more clearly. There is no romanticism about indigenous people here either. While Delion draws our attention to the difficulties of making cross-cultural interpretations, he tells us often enough to suggest that participatory action research can sometimes be co-opted within oppressed groups to confirm existing advantages within those groups. He also points out the need for close personal contact between 'animateurs' and the communities they work with and for case studies using different kinds of media so others may learn not only how change can be effected, but that they can do it for themselves. Nevertheless, despite the density of the animateur network (one animateur for every 200 adults), he argues from this experience that broad forms of political and substantive support are necessary for successful participatory action research. This includes support located in the formal institutions of government and higher education—in other words, participation must be broadly understood and practiced, not quarantined as a modus operandi of oppositional community groups.

Nurse educator Arphorn Chuaprapaisilp provides her reinterpretation of participatory action research for staff development in her field at Prince of Songkla University, Thailand. Now Associate Dean for Research and Foreign Affairs, Dr. Chuaprapaisilp is a strong advocate for participatory action research in nurse education and community development in Thailand. She has recently collaborated with Anglia Polytechnic University Professor Richard Winter to develop a jointly recognized postgraduate certificate in action research. Here she draws upon her earlier work in participatory action research. Focusing especially on reflection on experience, she argues that very disciplined data collection is necessary for nurse educators to reform an old tradition in much professional education. This old tradition assumes that 'theory' is taught in class and is then tried out or, perhaps more accurately, 'applied' by students in practice. This tradition, of course, contrasts with the fundamental idea of participatory action research, which is about theorizing *in* and *from* practice.

Chuaprapaisilp's approach to participatory action research locates participants in the research act and is somewhat individualistic, reflecting perhaps the action learning and process management movement in adult education. While the paper does not focus on the politics of action research and perhaps tends to writing about the action research of others without problematizing the role of the academic researcher, at the same time, her informative reference to the deeply introspective teachings of Buddhism raises impor-