Action Research

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A R T I C L E

Participatory action research

First-person perspectives of a graduate student

Judy Burgess
University of Victoria, Canada

A B S T R A C T

This article examines the tensions and challenges of a graduate student maneuvering the institutional hierarchies in her journey of participatory action research (PAR). By using a first-person action research framework, the researcher moves back and forth exploring the prose of others, and revealing her reflexive self-inquiry of underlying assumptions and beliefs. Iterations of insider-outsider positionality, drawing on and integrating paradigms, reconciling multiple roles and perspectives, exploring the complexity of power relations, and uncovering the promises and perils of PAR, moves the researcher toward a partnership with her community of inquiry. First-person action research unfolds a process of self-transformation.

K E Y W O R D S

- first-person action research
- graduate student self-inquiry
- participatory action research

> As a doctoral student with a deep sense of knowing in my commitment to participatory action research, my rebellious determination rises with each disdainful comment or question: PAR is too long and involved for a student. Focus on your question and methodology will follow. What does PAR really teach a student about research methods? How will you defend issues of validity and credibility at a doctoral level?

Participatory action research (PAR) is gaining acceptability in many university circles (Bryant-Lukosius & DiCenso, 2004; Hall, 2001; Kelly, 2005; Nelson, Poland, Murray & Maticka-Tyndale, 2004). Yet from a graduate student perspective, there are tensions and challenges to reconcile. As I return to the academy for advanced learning, I recognize these tensions as disjuncture and therefore important to explore and understand.

The first tension emerges as role hierarchy. As a nurse knowledgeable in the community with its many and varied ways, my visionary leadership contributed to the possibilities of community health care. Yet, I return to school as a student scholar. This shifting between the worlds of community leader and novice scholarship, and maneuvering between hierarchies of health and now academia, confronts my sense of identity and confidence. Matters of who am I, where am I going, and how to hold on to my community roots are ever present.

The second challenge soon surfaces with my commitment to PAR. Graduate program protocol have requirements and limitations (Gibbon, 2002; Levin & Greenwood, 2001; Stoecker, 2003). As a student researcher, I must develop research competencies, identify a research query, design a proposal, and gain university ethics approval, prior to actively engaging in partnership with a community of interest (Gibbon, 2002; Nelson et al., 2004; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Yet, contrary to participatory action principles, by taking control of the research process, I jeopardize the defining partnership of PAR.

The notion of 'first, second, and third person' action research presents an appealing framework to address these challenges (Torbert, 2001). As a doctoral student at the University of Victoria, I am using first-person action research to engage early in my learning journey, before formalizing a research plan. First-person action research constructs an iterative process, where I can address the student tensions of role hierarchy and transition, and the contradictions of community engagement. By drawing on the PAR literature to inform my reflections of knowledge and experience, examine roles I have and will take, gain awareness of the principles, promises, and perils of PAR, and reveal my underlying assumptions and beliefs, I am able to mitigate or advance these parts of me for the cooperative inquiry process. This article will highlight reflexivity with PAR literature and self-reflections, in order to embrace these tensions of personal transformation and community partnership.

Participatory action research as a worldview

Discourse in research terminology is a beginning place for graduate students. Reason and Bradbury's (2001) working definition for action research is 'a participatory, democratic practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview' (p. 1). In documenting progression of this philosophy, credit is first given to Lewin in the 1940s for coining the term 'action research' to link the cycles of theory, practice, and problem-solving (Greenwood & Levin, 1998; McTaggart, 1997; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Freire (1970, revised 1993), eminent for advancing critical consciousness (conscientization) and social action (praxis), shared the collective power gained by oppressed Latin American communities. Hall is recognized for describing PAR 'as an integrated activity that combines social investigation, educational work and action' (1981, p. 7), 'designed to support those with less power in their organization or community settings' (2001, p. 171). Through international and Third World work, he highlights the value of social movements to educate and effect social action. Tandon (1988) noted the rhetoric of community 'involvement with risk of co-option', and compared this to 'authentic participation', where communities control the research process. McTaggart (1997) used the full-term 'participatory action research' to emphasize both authentic participation and relevancy of actions. Still other variations exist, such as cooperative inquiry, emancipatory action research, appreciative inquiry, feminist participatory research, and community-based participatory research (Heron, 1996; Kemmis, 2001; Ludema, Cooperrider & Barrett, 2001; Maguire, 1987; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003).

Wallerstein and Duran (2003) delineate two historic traditions, a northern tradition that accounts for systemic improvements, and a southern tradition of emancipatory developments. Habermas (1987) is credited for calling emancipatory practice, the 'life world' (Kemmis, 2001; Wallerstein & Duran, 2003), where sharing power with poor and oppressed people gives voice to their decision-making and control to regenerate citizenship (Burgess, 1995; McKnight, 1987). Alternatively, the northern tradition, as Habermas terms the 'systems-world', consists of structures, economics, and politics. Whitehead, Taket and Smith (2003) make a case for PAR in health promotion and organizational change, and cite innovation, practitioner learning, and user participation as elements of transformative practice. Bryant-Lukosius and DiCesno (2004) outline a participatory framework (PEPPA) to develop, implement, and evaluate advanced practice nursing. The northern tradition of PAR is also evident in public health, heart health, osteoporosis, street youth, and other health areas (Israel et al., 2003; Naylor, Wharf-Higgins, Blair, Green & O'Connor, 2002; Whitehead, Keast, Montgomery & Hayman, 2004; Whitmore & McKee, 2001); and in disciplines with social workers, midwives, nursing, child welfare, and holistic medical prac-

titioners (Baldwin, 2001; Barrett, 2001; Hills, 2001; Lawson, Anderson-Butcher, Petersen & Barkdull, 2003; Reason, 1988, 1991).

Self-reflection: making sense of my worldview of PAR

Reading the literature has led me to choose the term 'participatory action research' to describe my worldview. Like McTaggart (1997), I see importance in emphasizing 'real' participation and 'worthy' action. Hall's (1981) definition combining social investigation, educational work, and action is salient to my inquiry. My research is a social investigation with primary health care nurse practitioners and their respective teams engaging in interprofessional collaboration. Working collectively to uncover and advance knowledge and practice is an educational process. Using this knowledge within a team context to create innovation, and transformation is collective action. However, I have been troubled with the 'systems think' of my research interest and its relevance to PAR.

From my experience in community health, I came to know the southern tradition of PAR. Learning of critical consciousness, emancipation, and social justice is the basis for my understanding of transformative community work, and my past nurse-client relational practice. As my community health work evolved, I became passionate in envisioning and demonstrating the local possibilities for health promotion and primary health care. Within this health context, I was challenged to rethink the individual lifestyle approach to health, and instead create capacity in community to transform social policies and organizational structures, and thereby improve such health determinants as early childhood and education, food security, employment and working conditions, health care services, housing, income and its distribution, and a social safety net (Nelson et al., 2004; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2002; Raphael, 2003; World Health Organization, 2003). Located now in academia, PAR seems integral to my soul. Yet, I have worried that my interest in systems improvement distorts the emancipatory intentions of PAR. Learning about north-south traditions reframes my view, and enables me to make sense of system reforms and health service research, as part of a northern tradition and applicable to a worldview of PAR. With this renewed insight, my commitment to PAR remains sound.

First-, second-, third-person research

Participatory action research falls under the rubric of a philosophy or approach to research. Reason and Bradbury (2001) have named this approach and its practices as an 'action research family' (p. xxiv). In recognition of diversity within this lineage, Reason and Torbert (2001) formulated a three-person framework. These

three separate, yet integrated pathways are described as first-, second-, and third-person action research. First-person action research fosters self-inquiry and increasing awareness of the researcher's own everyday life as the process unfolds. Second-person action research focuses on interpersonal encounters, and the researcher's ability to collaborate with others in their community of inquiry. Third-person research activities extend the inquiry within a wider community with intent to transform the politics of the issue.

In exploring transformational change of institutional systems, Bradbury and Reason (2001) differentiated first-person practice as 'work for oneself', second-person as 'work for partners', and third-person as 'work for people in the wider context' (p. 449). Torbert (2001) explains action inquiry begins in the personal with 'meditative inner work' (p. 252), which enhances second-person relational practice, in being truthful and congruent of intended meaning and dialogue with others; these self-study and interpersonal skills reinforce qualities of third-person leadership, necessary for creating organizational conditions of transformation. Heen (2005) interprets first-person action research as a focus on the single person, second-person for people coming together in cooperative inquiry, and third-person extended to larger collectives or community. Kemmis (2001) speaks of opening 'communicative space' for progressive mutual understanding, authentic engagement, and consensus on and about action (p. 100).

This discussion is not intended to describe first-, second- and third-person action research as a linear experience. All parts of the unfolding inquiry process have iterative cycles of self-learning, reflection, and action (Heen, 2005; Koch, Mann, Kralik & van Loon, 2005; Levin & Greenwood, 2001). Nonetheless, the novice researcher has permission, if not expectation, to begin with self-discovery, in order to locate themselves in their inquiry (Reason & Marshall, 2001; Rowan, 2001). Marshall and Mead (2005), in a special journal issue devoted to first-person action research, summarize first-person qualities as: 'living in the inquiry, practicing new behaviors, reflecting-in-action, conceptualizing new learning about one's identity, staying present to a range of emotional responses, and cultivating a quality of critical humility' (p. 241). For a graduate student embarking on PAR, first-person research offers a practical approach for stepping lightly into research through self-inquiry, second-person research is a means for contextualizing a relationship with a community of interest, and third-person research is the unfolding reality of researcher and community becoming both the data and data collectors in a combined reflexive journey to make sense of and transform that which is not.

Self-reflection: first-person action research explicates my role as insider

A self-inquiry begins with my own look, think, and action cycles, where I bring forward my knowledge and practice experience for new learning and discovery, and explore being both an insider and outsider in my community inquiry (Koch et al., 2005). Being authentic about who I am and what I bring to the research is a measure of research validity (Heen, 2005; Heron & Reason, 2001; Schein, 2001; Whitehead et al., 2003). My profession is nursing, and my interests lay within health care design, in particular, how practitioners collaborate and how communities participate in collaboration. In order to qualify for graduate scholarship, it was necessary that I develop a research query early in my program; only to worry I had breached a central principle of PAR, which is, begin with real-life issues that originate in and are identified by the community of interest (Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Hall, 2001; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Yet, my query is not without insider significance.

As director of a community health care centre for many years, I came to appreciate the possibilities and challenges of local health care design, the capacities and barriers of practitioners in collaboration, and the burden of illness relieved by the power of participation. However, I now live in the academic world, where I am reinventing myself from community leader to academic scholar. I am learning to see the world beyond local experience, opening up to broader perspectives, and finding new ways to take up leadership. In this role transition, I am confronted with the distinction of insider-outsider (Minkler, 2004). My query begins with nurse practitioners (NPs), who have a newly constituted health role, along with implementation of legislation, regulation, and education. Yet, as an advanced practice nurse, I stand outside their clinical entitlement. Nonetheless, I have knowledge of nursing leadership and know what it means to be influential (Gibbon, 2002). I have experience of interprofessional collaboration, teamwork, and sharing power with others, including community. Heron (1996) speaks of a 'deep kind of participative knowing', where the researcher is grounded in their experience as co-subject (p. 21). As a co-learner and co-researcher within this health care context, drawing on my experience assures me that I am both an insider to this nursing perspective and to this inquiry.

My research question, congruent with PAR and important to my profession, begins by asking what matters to NPs in this team setting of primary health care and how can they contribute to the advancement of interprofessional collaboration. As an insider with knowledge and experience, I appreciate the value of interprofessional collaboration to practitioner satisfaction and improved outcomes for clients. My insider assumptions about NP readiness to engage in team actions and strategies have significance, and I can therefore look ahead to

the possibilities within the research process. Minkler and Hancock (2003) outline core PAR principles: 'start where the people are' (p. 136), 'begin with community strengths and assets, rather than problems' (p. 137), and accent 'authentic dialogue' (p. 138). Fitting with these principles, my inquiry validates the capacity of NPs and their teams to transform practice, and thereby include and improve the client experience of health (Bryant-Lukosius & DiCenso, 2004).

PAR draws on and integrates worldviews

As research history has evolved from a modern to post-modern to participatory worldview, there has become a blending of that which is useful and a distancing from the irrelevant (Park, 2001; Rowan, 2001). Reason and Bradbury (2001) discuss the basis for modernism as a 'quest for certainty', in response to historical challenges of war and devastation. Certainty became truth and truth became objectivity. This positivist, western-known, paradigm is criticized for separating the subjective of everyday life from the object of study, and the objective knowledge produced (Maguire, 1987). Positivism, taken up by science and medicine with a purpose of alleviating suffering, has excluded the everyday experience of suffering (Kemmis, 2001). As an empirical-analytic approach, researchers separate mind, body, spirit, and reality in the objective world of the individual, and split again from community and the wider natural world (Reason, 1998). Fals Borda (2001) notes 'we [action researchers] started to appreciate in fact that science is socially constructed, therefore that it is subject to reinterpretation, revision and enrichment' (p. 28). Mediating discourse of subject-object, knowledge-power, and research validity of the personal, emerged as a post-modern perspective (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001; Gustavsen, 2001; Kemmis, 2001; Maguire, 1987).

Social science explored a new paradigm of qualitative and humanistic experience. Power imbalances of individualistic society, race and culture, gender relations, knowledge ownership, and hierarchical structures were revealed (Bell, 2001; Lincoln, 2001b; Maguire, 1987). A consciousness transpired of multiple and socially constructed realities in a changing world (Avramidis & Smith, 1999; Reason, 1998). Feminism, perceived as a universal ontology, yet with differing perspectives in ways of knowing and ways of being, illustrates the multiplicity in feminist epistemology (Maguire, 1987, 2001; Treleaven, 2001; Wallerstein & Duran, 2003). Foucault's work on power and knowledge, as inextricably bound, contributed to an era of post-structuralism (1982). Repressive power was translated to productive and relational, where knowledge as power strengthens resistance, empowerment, and enabling action (Chavez, Duran, Baker, Avila, & Wallerstein, 2003; Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001; Pasmore, 2001). Yet, the interpretive constructionist paradigm was seen to maintain researcher distance from

the object of study (Bradbury, 2001). 'After all, much which goes under the label of qualitative research is just old empiricist research without numbers' (Rowan, 2001, p. 121). Maguire (1987) notes in her story telling approach of giving voice to women that 'research is not a neutral tool for the creation of supposedly "apolitical" knowledge' (p. 24). Growing awareness of researcher complicity in design and control of politics, process, and outcomes was instrumental to an emergent participatory worldview (Fals Borda, 2001; Lincoln, 2001b; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Marshall, 2001). The aim of PAR is to 'connect the personal to the political' (Park, 2001, p. 92; Nelson et al., 2004, p. 394).

While the participatory worldview competes with both modernism and post-modernism, it also 'draws on and integrates both paradigms' (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 7). In acknowledging the 'real' reality of natural sciences, PAR is able to utilize the benefits of positivist knowledge, framed within a human context (Greenwood & Levin, 1998). From a qualitative and critical social paradigm, 'communicative action' of social, gender, political, and cultural influences, in the construction of reality, are advanced from 'what is' to what is possible' (Kemmis, 2001; Park, 2001). PAR is described as a '*vivencia* necessary for the achievement of progress and democracy; a complex of attitudes and values that would give meaning to our praxis in the field' (Fals Borda, 2001, p. 31). As an ontological philosophy of life, PAR is also seen as an epistemological approach to constructing useful knowledge, and as a research methodology for collective consciousness and participative action (Heron, 1996; Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Schwandt, 2001).

Self-reflection: PAR integrates my many perspectives

My formative years were highly influenced by my biologist father and many visits to the university lab, where I examined cats and rats splayed out on tables poked with multiple colored pins. I became a nurse, contemplated the life of a doctor, and went back to school to obtain a science degree. I became the dissector in the lab. However, there were other parts of my young years that gave me multiple perspectives, such as students of other race and country that came home to dinner, my mother a war-bride, the family struggles of many children to feed and care for, and of course, the social movements of feminism and student activism.

As a nurse, I was drawn to both the technical aspects of nursing, like ER and OR, and the human aspects of my profession, such as maternity and mental health. Leslie and McAllister (2002) speak of 'nursedness', a unique character and ability of nurses to be empathic, trusted, and practical. Community health nursing won over my passion because of its complexity and challenges. Community health work is messy and I am an organized kind of person; multi-

plicity is inherent in its diversity and I am a logical kind of thinker; it calls for participation and I like to be in control of my destiny. These dichotomies stretch me, challenge me to be innovative, and have kept me open to life-long learning and change.

PAR takes me to an inspiring place, where I strive to create a community of inquiry, apply my creativity, and be futuristic. I long ago reconciled the duality of subjective/objective in master's program debates of qualitative and positivist doctrines, and I am ready to move beyond an ethnographic approach to research. I appreciate the integration of paradigms offered by PAR, the opening up of possibilities for graduate learning, and the giving back to community that PAR promises me (Bradbury, 2001). It seems a good fit for the discipline of nursing, and appropriate for nurse practitioners whose practice straddles biomedical and humanistic knowledge of health (Brant-Lukosius & DiCenso, 2004; Kelly, 2005; White, Suchowierska & Campbell, 2004). PAR suits my topic of interprofessional collaboration, where disciplines with varying knowledge and worldviews come together to reconcile power relations, sharing perspectives, and making sense of the team dynamics; and these congruences reinforces my commitment once again (Munoz & Jeris, 2005; Nelson et al., 2004).

Dimensions of knowing and participation: reflexivity and validity

Participatory action researchers describe forms of knowledge and participation necessary to broaden existing epistemology. Park (2001) introduced a framework of representational, relational, and reflexive knowledge. Representational knowledge is both functional in correlating variables, and interpretative in making meaning of these connections. Relational knowledge captures the understanding we have for each other as human beings. Reflective knowledge connects the social nature of human life to the problematic, with critical analysis of moral and values based actions. These multidimensional forms of knowing are interdependent and reflexive in linking theory and practice in the creation of knowledge (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001; Schwandt, 2001). Finlay (2002) defines reflexivity as 'thoughtful, conscious self-awareness' (p. 532) in constructing interpretations and 'moving back and forth in a dialectic between experience and awareness' (p. 533). In PAR, a reflexive dialogue occurs amongst participants, where they examine their motivations, assumptions, various roles, tensions and power imbalances, to create a congruence and credibility in what and how is researched (Naylor et al., 2002; Rowan, 2001). The researcher's practice of self-reflexivity, with attention to their own everyday life, is key to being present in dialogue with others (Reason, 1988; Treleaven, 2001).

Reason (1998) extends dimensions of participation as political, epistemo-

logical, ecological, and spiritual imperatives. From a political perspective, participation addresses human rights and flourishing. Epistemology, inextricably linked to participation, views the world as not separate, but instead, as 'relationships, which we co-author' (p. 7). An ecological dimension affirms human persons as part of the natural world and universe. A spiritual imperative of participation ensures human inquiry is about healing and holism. Participatory action researchers take into account the wholeness of the inquiry and through reflexive looking, learning, and action co-generate meaningful practical knowledge (Greenwood & Levin, 1998).

Concerned with the practical and the applied, PAR is a process of choosing and framing an issue, creating relational experiences, effecting changes in practice, and actualizing the significance of that 'truly worthy of human aspiration' (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 12). Cooperative inquiry, a form of participatory research, applies repeated cycles of reflection as co-researchers, and action as co-subjects. Understanding is deepened and validated by the group's authentic collaboration and balancing of consensus, collusion, tensions and distress (Heron & Reason, 2001; Reason, 1999). Through a collective process, validity procedures are designed to assess group performance in solving problems (Levin & Greenwood, 2001; Reason, 1988; Whitehead et al., 2003). Lincoln (2001a) describes validity as 'mindfulness of self and others', a practical nature to the research, and a commitment to action (p. 48). Reason and Bradbury (2001) discuss quality of action research as choice-points: being explicit of relational participation, cultivating critical consciousness, guided by reflexivity and pragmatic outcomes, inclusive of multidimensional knowing, having significance to human flourishing, and contributing to new enduring infrastructure.

Self-reflection: first-person reflexivity reconciles multiple roles and knowing

Located now in academia, first-person reflexivity helps me to explore the everyday transitions of multiple roles and transformation that comes with learning. As a doctoral student in the role of learner with other students who see the world from varying perspectives, I am both a health leader in bringing forward knowledge and practice, and a novice with much learning to assimilate. As an educator, I share knowledge with my students about empowerment, being with clients, social inequities of poverty, and an understanding of health as holistic. As an advanced practice nurse, I gain a broader sense of my nursing profession and strengthen my disciplinary relations. As a researcher, I develop new associations, craft innovative partnerships, and reconstruct my network with NPs in their primary health care context. I encounter the inklings of being a scholar, when my previous experience, access to new knowledge, and renewed status influence the

academic world and organizational leaders. These roles of student, leader, educator, nurse, researcher, and scholar integrate with my personal life of being mother, wife, friend, and citizen (Gibbon, 2002; Rowan, 2001). Each part I play necessitates clarity, which in turn raises my critical consciousness and makes congruent my wholeness (Heen, 2005). Reflexivity helps to separate and integrate these parts of me, and ensure congruence in my research process. In so doing, first person cycles of reflection and action validate the 'stepping into' of graduate level research (Munoz & Jeris, 2005; Reason & Marshall, 2001).

I appreciate the privilege of knowledge and power in the academy, and at the same time experience power relations, hierarchies, and rules and regulations of the university. Yet, I feel safe as a student in the university setting, where I have a certain status, support, and flexibility. I am more anxious in my role as advanced practice nurse without a health care setting, and researcher without a sanctioned research project. Excited by moments of synchronicity in my new academic life, I gain confidence that my path is right and my efforts are worthwhile (Marshall, 2001). Making sense of feelings and emotions, such as these, are indicators of my critical subjectivity and self-awareness (Heen, 2005; Nolan, 2005).

However, the social relations and organizational structures of power and politics still loom large in my praxis of transformational learning and change. As I explore my profession of nursing, the complexities of interprofessional collaboration, and the context of primary health care, endorsement and support is needed from the university, the health care organization, and nursing leaders. My challenge in the early research stage is to resituate myself in this health context, in a new role of scholar, and trust my knowledge and experience will be welcomed by my community partners. There are many unknowns and hurdles yet to overcome. First-person inquiry assists me in revealing next steps of this grand, yet improvised plan, as I explore my assumptions and discover the principles, promises, and perils of PAR (Gibbon, 2002).

Uncovering PAR principles, promises, and perils and processes

PAR is a collective dynamic process that encourages a high degree of participation, where community members become co-learners, co-researchers, and co-activists of a common concern. Challenges begin early in determining who is the community or actual participants of the research (White et al., 2004). Partnerships may include representatives of health organizations, academia, practitioners, and community members (Israel et al., 2003; Mitton & Patten, 2004; Sullivan, Chao, Allen, Kone, Pierre-Louis & Krieger, 2003). The researcher models self-study and mentors participants in reflective learning and critical sub-

jectivity (Koch et al., 2005; McTaggart, 1997). Group members gain facilitation skills, meaningful roles, and make it their own (Heron & Reason, 2001; Koch et al., 2005; Sullivan et al., 2003; Wadsworth, 2001). As real-life issues emerge and are defined through collective engagement, participants articulate agreement to discover and create knowledge for practical human flourishing (Israel et al., 2003; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Friedman (2001) refers to 'building theories in practice' by identifying practice puzzles and making sense of them (p. 161). Positive questioning, as illustrated in appreciative inquiry, encourages participants to gain hope, excitement, and ownership of their future (Ludema et al., 2001).

A common identity develops with recognition of each other's knowing and expertise. Yet group members have varying degrees of expertise and experiences of power. As diversity is explored, the group shares the personal and practical, gaining group confidence for shared decision-making (Lawson et al., 2003). Disclosure creates a sense of trust, cooperation, and mutual obligation. Issues of time and commitment arise to threaten decision-making and group sense of equality (Whitmore & McKee, 2001). Differences in worldview, multiple perspectives, differing goals, and changing agendas strengthen and jeopardize solidarity, yet at the same time, enrich construction of new meanings (Friedman, 2001; Levin & Greenwood, 2001; Munoz & Jeris, 2005). 'Conscious and unconscious, discussable and undiscussable' surface and interconnect for deeper meaning (Wadsworth, 2001, p. 425). Questions of control emerge and are resolved through dialogue, listening, and learning (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Martin, 2001). Differences poorly negotiated run the risk of the research agenda superseding the community perspective (Wallerstein & Duran, 2003). Relationship-building and attention to a democratic process, as equal to, or more important than the outcomes, consolidates group dynamics (Gustavsen, 2001; Sullivan et al., 2003). Ideally, the researcher comes to share the same goals and values taken up by group participants (Lincoln, 2001a). Common language and understanding reinforces collaboration and contributes to group empowerment, mutual decision-making, and power sharing (Friedman, 2001; Israel et al, 2003).

Design planning accommodates diverse research methodology and draws on quantitative and qualitative methods (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). This versatility may cause undue complexity and unwieldy group process. Starting small and using iterative cycles of action and reflection, aids the unfolding research process, and balances agendas of knowledge creation and transformation (Heron & Reason, 2001). Participants record changes in their progress of activities, practices, relationships, and expertise (McTaggart, 1997). Again, the limitless boundaries of the inquiry may cause group chaos and time demands (Lawson et al., 2003; Reason, 1988, 1999; Whitehead et al., 2003). Long-term commitment, often difficult for participants and student researchers, is overcome by the value participants place on the research (Minkler & Hancock, 2003) Collaboration in all aspects of the research process validates a more accurate and authentic

dialogue, analysis of social reality, and fostering of findings and solutions (Israel et al., 2003, McTaggart, 1997; Reason, 1988).

The goals of PAR are realized, as willingness for self-scrutiny, enhanced awareness, and self-reliance develops, in an individual and joint spiral of learning and change (Martin, 2001). As part of creating change, the researcher shares with participants ways of influencing decision-makers and community leaders for relevant policymaking (Lincoln, 2001a; Themba & Minkler, 2003). Together they discover and co-author knowledge, create innovation, and validate their collective efforts, by mobilization of others and transformation of systems and social culture (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). As learning and knowledge development take place, issues of knowledge ownership and individual and joint publications are addressed, along with agreements on dissemination and knowledge translation (Hills, 2001; Israel et al., 2003; Reason, 1988). These are particularly important matters to graduate students, who must prove themselves through academic publishing, conference presentations, and ownership of their dissertation. Closure of this lengthy process is also an essential element that requires attention. PAR, done well, has tangible results, where group participants gain a stronger sense of self, enhanced knowledge of the issue explored, a sustained network to draw upon, a more democratic structure for humanistic policymaking, and an improved status in the lives of the people who are beneficiaries (Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Hall, 2001; McTaggart, 1997).

Self-reflection: revealing my beliefs and assumptions integrates my wholeness

The many and varied roles I live cannot be subdivided or compartmentalized. PAR, being context-bound (Levin & Greenwood, 2001), and yet open to multiplicity (Maguire, 1987), permits me to be situated and synergistic in my multiple roles and interests in research. My roles of student, leader, educator, nurse, researcher, scholar, participant, and community member come together in a balancing act of staying true to PAR. Hierarchy has no place in the flourishing of community, yet challenges us daily with structures and regulations. My life experience has taught me that congruency in what I believe in and what I do keeps me healthy in mind, body, and spirit. My research topic of interprofessional collaboration with nurse practitioners in their context of teamwork presents a congruency with PAR that is hard for me to ignore. The synchronicity of opportunities in academia, thus far, reinforces my path.

My commitment to PAR comes from working in and with community organizations, where I experienced the isolation of limited resources, including access to and influence of research. I came to the academy with the intent of improving this inequity. I believe PAR has a contribution to make in reconnecting

universities and communities in co-generation and co-ownership of knowledge (Levin & Greenwood, 2001). I have confidence in collective problem-solving. Learning about collaboration is an important contribution to collective endeavors. Hall (2001) speaks of the research process as being genuinely and organically situated. The knowers and known in a community come together with academia to allow learning and action to emerge. Validity is measured by the depth of relationship, plurality of knowing, practical significance, and enduring nature of inquiry (Bradbury & Reason, 2001). First-person research allows me to explore what I bring to the relationships within community and this strengthens my validity as a researcher and participant.

Challenges will come and go. I remind myself daily in moments of anxiousness or over exertion, and confusion and complexities resolve as the process of learning unfolds. I willingly abandon research results and give over to the power of process, as I believe there is rarely a quick fix. The process is the learning that makes for transformation. Heen (2005) describes her uneasiness in first-person inquiry to over inquire, and suggests instead to 'let the wholeness be' (p. 275). I too have discomfort in first-person research, particularly in revealing my self-inquiry of private thoughts and tensions, yet this is the process that creates my wholeness.

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Judy Burgess is a doctoral student in the Interdisciplinary Graduate Program at the
University of Victoria. Her dissertation study is participatory action research with
nurse practitioners to advance interprofessional collaboration in primary health
care. She holds a Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR) doctoral award and
is a student of the Canadian Heath Services Research Foundation/CIHR Advanced
Practice Nursing Chair. Judy is a Registered Nurse with a background in community
health nursing, has a Masters in Nursing Policy and Practice, currently teaches in the
School of Nursing and is also engaged with a research project on Interprofessional
Education. *Address*: University of Victoria, School of Nursing, PO Box 1700, Victoria,
BC, V8W 2Y2, Canada. [*Email*: jburgess@uvic.ca]