The continuum of participation

How to make research socially responsive, socially responsible and socially useful

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APPLIED LINGUISTICS

Overview

1. What is participatory research?
2. Varied models (‘ladders’) of participation
3. My working definition and continuum of participation
4. Benefits and potential dangers of partially participatory research
5. Example
6. Challenges
7. Workshop activities (30 mins)
8. Round-up, references and questions

Participatory research: What is it?

- Often-cited definition:
  - “participatory research focuses on a process of sequential reflection and action, carried out ***with*** and ***by*** local people rather than ***on*** them. Local knowledge and perspectives are not only acknowledged but form the basis for research and planning” (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995, p. 1667, emphasis added)
- Many sources tend to conflate participation and action (e.g., Finn, 1994; Thiollent, 2011).
- But these can be usefully separated:
  - “participatory research… shifts the emphasis from action and change to collaborative research activities” (Bergold & Thomas, 2012, p. 195; also Hansen et al., 2001).

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  - “participatory research… shifts the emphasis from action and change to collaborative research activities” (Bergold & Thomas, 2012, p. 195; also Hansen et al., 2001).
- **Does ‘participation’ have to be an all or nothing affair?**

Ladders/Hierarchies of participation

Arnstein's was first (1969, p. 217)

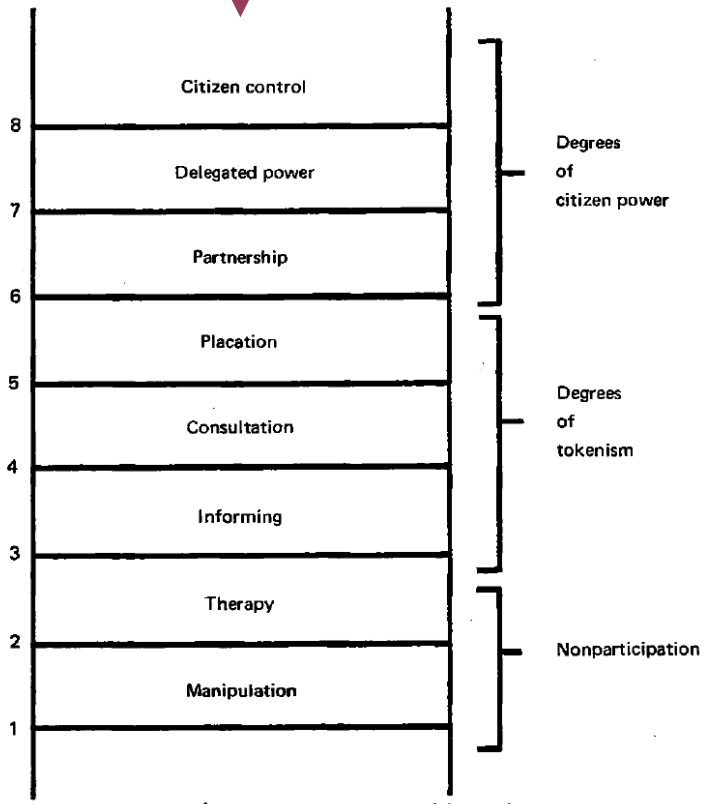
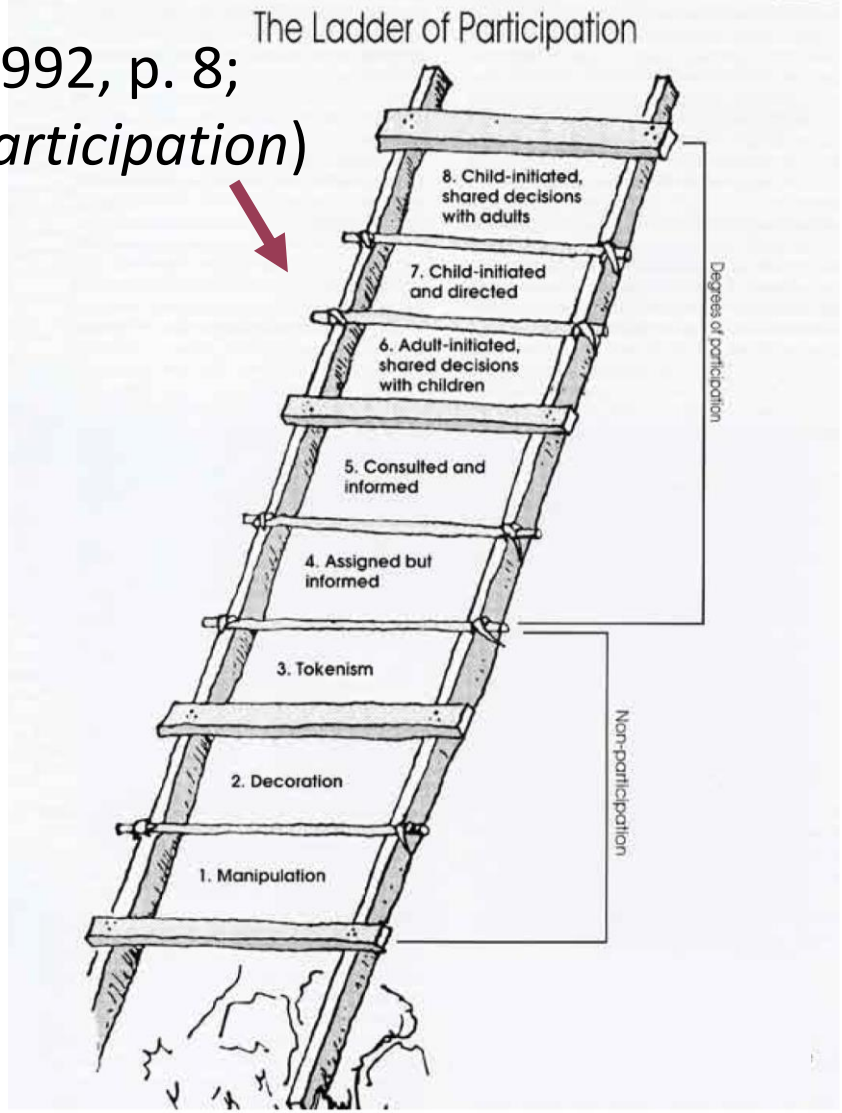


FIGURE 2 *Eight Rungs on a Ladder of Citizen Participation*

Hart (1992, p. 8; *child participation*)



Pretty (1995, p. 1252; *display reversed*)

7. Self-mobilization
6. Interactive participation
5. Functional participation
4. Participation for material incentives
3. Participation by consultation
2. Passive participation
1. Manipulative participation

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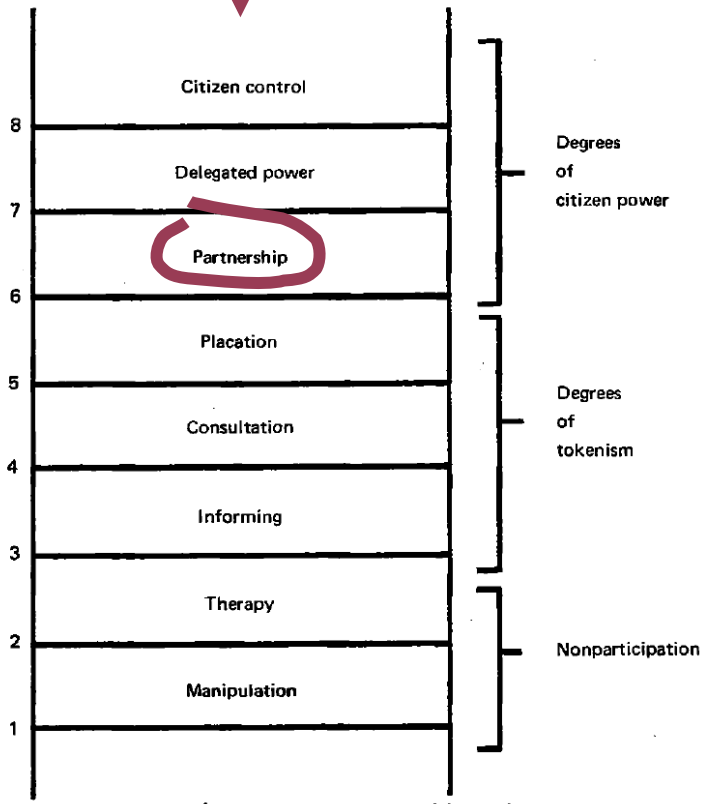

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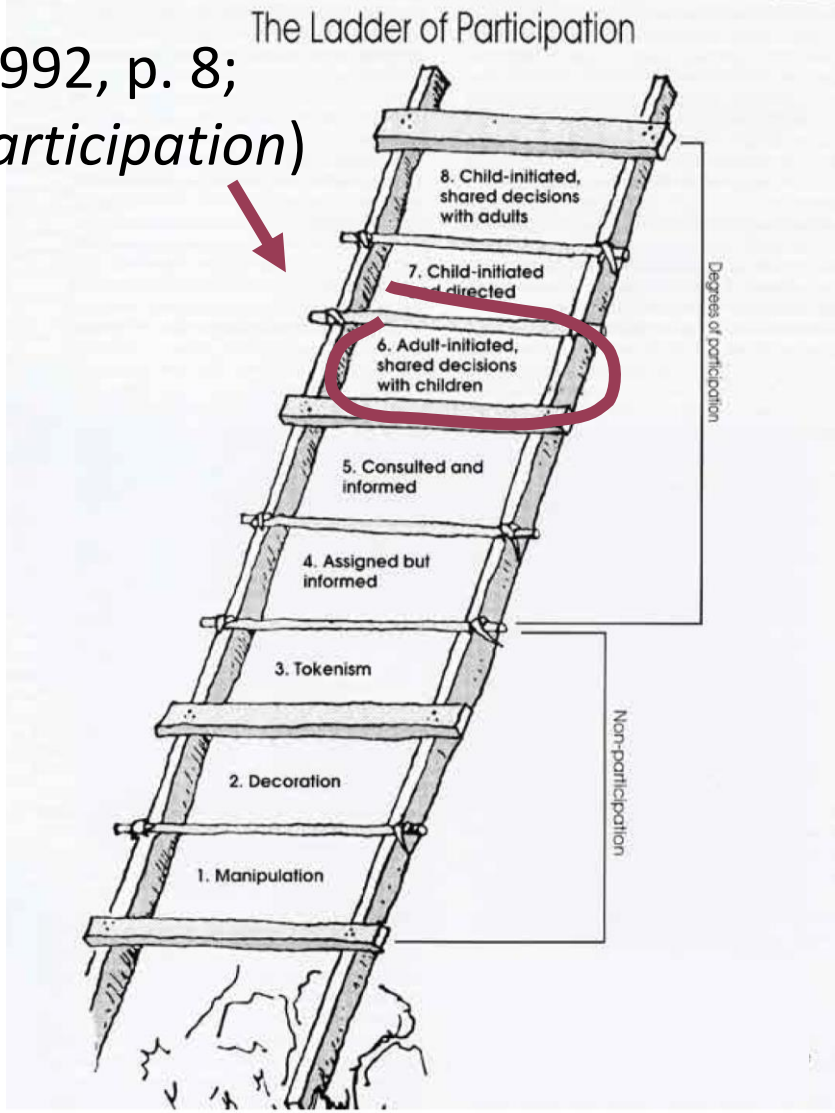

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Minimum requirements for a study to be *partially* participatory

- Sources (e.g., Bergold & Thomas, 2012; Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Pretty, 1995; Thiollent, 2011) largely agree that for a study to be considered participatory:
  a) both sides (participant[s] and researcher) must benefit from the research process;
  b) there needs to be meaningful interaction at the study design stage, when…

  > "the most important distinctions centre on how and by whom is the research question formulated and by and for whom are research findings used [sic]"
  > (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995, p. 1668)

- These criteria can be met through Pretty's (1995) "functional participation" or Arnstein's (1969) "partnership".

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- These criteria can be met through Pretty's (1995) "functional participation" or Arnstein's (1969) "partnership".
- My working definition of participatory research:

  Participatory research involves key stakeholders and researchers working together to varying degrees in order to identify and pursue outcomes that are useful for all parties

Why might PPR be a good idea?

A continuum of participation

1. Non-participation

- Researcher-led
- Participant consent is sought
- Participants may be consulted (e.g., member checking, logistics), but not given control, responsibility or workload beyond data collection

2. Partial participation

- Collaboration between researchers and participants
- May be either participant-led or researcher-led, or this may vary during the project
- Control, responsibility and workload are shared

3. Full participation

- Participant-led
- Researcher(s) adopts support role
- Participants have control, but also responsibility and workload

Benefits and dangers of partially participatory research

Advantages

1. Greater equity: power is (more) shared
2. Increased usefulness and relevance for practitioners
3. Sense of shared community and purpose
4. Facilitates more effective data collection and analysis

Potential dangers

1. Tokenism or manipulation (Arnstein, 1969)
2. Conflicting goals within the group
3. What happens if participants don't like the findings?

Why fully participatory teacher research isn't always desirable

1. Designs can be more complex, more ambitious (e.g., multi-site), leading to findings that may be generalisable or transferrable and more widely useful.
2. Opens up participation to a wider range of research designs (e.g., case study, ethnography, phenomenology).
3. Participants don't always have the time, interest or skills to conduct research; researchers can take away the burden of this while also allowing participants to have a say in the design.

Example study

Eight expert Indian teachers of English: A participatory comparative case study of teacher expertise in the Global South (Anderson, 2021, 2023a, 2023b)

Phase	PhD study	Participatory element
Preparatory phase ⇩	Conducted exploratory research with teachers in a relevant community (an Indian teacher association) to investigate their understandings of teacher quality.	
1. Theorising expertise ⇩	Developed theory and definition of teacher expertise. Appropriate criteria for recruiting participants for the main study were identified.	Equitable approach to participant recruitment was adopted.
2. Recruitment of participants ⇩	Participants were recruited through a call for expressions of interest via the Indian teacher association used in the preparatory phase, through self-evaluation of a range of criteria.	
3. Planning of study and outputs ⇩	One-day meeting was conducted with participants to plan the study (incl. study focus, research questions, approach, outputs, participant welfare).	Agreed on outcomes of interest to all participants (incl. co-authored book).
4. Data collection ⇩	Data collection tools were tailored to agreed focus. Initial pilot study led to minor modifications. Visits to remaining participants went largely to plan.	
5. Data analysis and writing ⇩	Data analysis for individual cases was conducted, including transcription, coding and analysis of data to build individual case descriptions.	Participants wrote chapters for co-authored book.
6. Comparative analysis and review ⇩	Cross-case comparison was conducted. Participant validation was conducted carefully over two phases.	Peer-review of each other's chapters.
7. Completion	Thesis completed.	Book published.

Participants waived the right to anonymity after participant validation. Instead, they wanted to be recognised and celebrated.

Figure from Anderson, 2023b.

Outputs (incl. post-doc.)

- My PhD study
- My academic publications
- Participants' own publications and presentations on the project
- Shared presentations and teacher development webinars
- The participants' book (Gode et al., 2021)

Challenges of making research more participatory

- Cornwall (2008, p. 274): “participatory interventions may result in effects that were never envisaged at the outset”.
- Design may sacrifice rigour in order to mitigate/address participant concerns or suggestions.
- Teacher expertise studies are likely to report positive findings, **but** “studies in which there are likely to be a number of critical findings may encounter more challenges when attempting to achieve a degree of useful participation” (Anderson, 2023a, p. 306).
- Those interested in conducting partially participatory studies should read Traianou’s cautionary tale (2007).

Brainstorming possibilities for making designs more participatory

Can we think of more e.g.s?

1. **Recruitment:** e.g. participants volunteer
2. **Study design:** e.g. decide on research questions together
3. **Data collection:** e.g. participants record own lessons
4. **Data analysis:** e.g. multiple stages of participant validation
5. **Outputs and dissemination:** e.g. participants present on research findings

Workshop activity

- Link coming in a moment
- Work in groups (Jason will assign online participants to breakout rooms)
- Choose or add a research method
- Discuss and add comments to the 6 sections - **prioritise section 4**
- Respond to others' comments
- Log out of Padlet first (or use different browser) if you want to contribute anonymously

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https://shorturl.at/ntCPU

Online people: Please go to the Padlet now!

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Our shared Padlet.
I’ll post online with talk slides later.
www.jasonanderson.org.uk

References and questions

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Workshop activity

- Work in groups
- Choose a method
- Create and complete a table in a document in Google Drive
- Share for comments and critique (e.g., via Padlet)

Team Name: _____

Research method	
Example in applied linguistics	
Typical participant involvement level	•
How it could be made to be more participatory	•
Cautions/ difficulties/ limitations	•