Ma Te Whānau Te Huarahi Motuhake:
Whānau Participatory Action Research groups

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Abstract: Whānau must lead their own development and solutions to work towards individual and collective whānau wellbeing for the future. Whānau are experts of their everyday lived experiences and hold the knowledge of their stories (past and present), aspirations, issues and complex dynamics that exist between whānau members and their extended and external relationships. This paper offers information and insights about Participatory Action Research (PAR) and PAR groups as realistic options when considering methods for research with whānau. In order to achieve this, the paper will describe Participatory Action Research (PAR), whānau PAR groups, alignment with Kaupapa Maori Research, pre-testing application with whānau and feedback received from a whānau PAR group.

Keywords: kaupapa; Māori; Participatory Action Research (PAR); whānau

Introduction

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is an approach from the social science research paradigm. It was developed as part of a shift away from traditional, positivist, science to work towards recognising and addressing complex human and social issues. PAR grew out of social and educational research and exists today to embrace and progress research principles of participation and reflection, empowerment and emancipation of groups seeking to improve their social situation (Seymour-Rolls & Hughes, 2000). PAR is often linked to a radical activist tradition from the work of Paulo Freire and others. The PAR name reflects its three central principles of participation, action and development of knowledge. It has the potential to address research and wider issues of social justice, inclusion and empowerment of minority and often marginalised communities. Smith (2006) states

> participatory action research, Kaupapa Māori research, oral histories, critical race theory and testimony are just some examples of methodologies that have been created as research tools that work with marginalised communities, that facilitate the expression of marginalised voices and that attempt to re-present the experience of marginalisation in genuine and authentic ways. (p. 7)

Community PAR research is described as an 'orientation' to research that recognises community members as experts about the phenomena of interest and allows the meaning and usefulness of research to be informed by their every-day experience and understanding. PAR focuses concurrently on creating action (or change) and research (or understanding) and includes an action research cycle of planning, action, observation and reflection (Jensen, Kaiwai, Greenaway & Conway, 2005).

The PAR approach requires active research participation and ownership by people in communities who are motivated to identify and address issues that concern them. Therefore research is co-constructed and informed at all stages *by* the identified community *for* that community. This is a departure from research being conducted by experts who extract information from a community and use it for purposes which may not directly benefit that community. PAR research uses the action reflection cycle of experiential learning and therefore is not research which is completed with the hope that action will follow but it is action which is researched, changed and re-researched in progressive cycles (Wadsworth, 1998). The development of knowledge that occurs during the process is empowering for communities who are enabled to find their own solutions to local issues and then

generate inquiry into the experiences and actions taken to address the issues. From this perspective PAR is a political process that supports 'community action' and 'social justice' and challenges structural inequalities. Wheeler (2001) advocates the use of community-based approaches to research when working with Aboriginal peoples because

> …history has demonstrated that outside 'solutions' for the 'Indian problem' simply do not work in our best interests. We are the only ones with the insight and capabilities to identify our 'problems' and come up with our own answers. (p. 101)

McHugh & Kowalski (2009) suggest that when developing research projects involving indigenous people those communities should be given the option of the PAR approach. The Canadian 2007 Guidelines for Health Research Involving Aboriginal Peoples state that this approach "has emerged as a deliberate form of resistance to traditional research practices that were perceived as a colonizing tool by research participants". The strength of engaging in PAR with indigenous communities has also been highlighted by a number of Māori scholars (Bishop, 2005; Smith, 1999, 2005).

Webster, Walsh-Tapiata, Warren, Kiriona and Rangatahi Researchers (2002), in their rangatahi project, suggest PAR as being able to assist to

> offer opportunities for rangatahi to define what hauora (well-being) means for them, to have the opportunity to be researchers and play a central role in the research process, to work alongside pakeke (adults) to write and deliver findings to various forums, and to offer a contribution to youth hauora and youth development that directly impacts on the lives of rangatahi Māori. (p. 179)

As with all research approaches and methods there are limitations and critique. PAR has a number of challenges and tensions. McHugh and Kowalski (2009) describe some of their experiences using PAR with young aboriginal women and issues encountered, including:

1. Defining the community – who and how this is achieved. Community is not always defined by geographical space but sometimes by ethnicity or other constructs.

2. Negotiating informed consent with youth – balancing the tension between indigenous peoples and a suspicion of research and consent processes based on experiences of colonisation. Also the tension between encouraging youth empowerment and self-determination however consent having to be granted by parents.

3. Relationships – balancing relationship expectations realistically between the researcher and the community participants.

4. Participant collaboration – not having expectations about the degree of participation from the community but allowing them to guide it.

Application

There is no 'one way to undertake a PAR process; however, put simply PAR is 'learning by doing' using a cyclic process of reflection, planning, action and observation. The beginning of a PAR project may be difficult to define but often occurs with a reflection when a group of people identify a thematic concern or issue and this is turned into a common goal. Participation is obtained through this shared goal and the desire to do something to resolve it. Participants are then empowered (often by collaboration with a researcher) to plan and create a social change. This change is implemented and observed using an appropriate research method and then the group critically examines the results and new knowledge from which theory may be developed or enhanced. The process can then continue on to a second cycle that may aim to advance or refine what has already been achieved. While this process is similar to many community development projects, research methods are used to collect and examine the data in a PAR project and this requires research knowledge. Such knowledge is often

obtained through collaboration with a researcher who may also be a member of the community of concern.

More recently, both globally and in Aotearoa, PAR is being used in community projects to ensure that the voices of marginalised populations are included and contribute to local solutions. Over the past few years in Aotearoa there are a number of Māori youth projects that have used Kaupapa Māori and PAR approaches to achieve youth solutions to youth issues. Webster, Walsh-Tapiata, Warren and Kiriona (2007, p. 1) suggest that the PAR approach "attempts to achieve rangatahi desired outcomes by valuing the experiences of the participants and giving rangatahi a sense of ownership over the research."

As PAR is an approach to research there are many methods and activities used that aim to maximise active participation and achieve a depth of data collection. There are huge variations in PAR projects and some do not look like research at all. However these PAR projects most often use PAR groups and include a range of information gathering mediums such as hui, community theatre, focus groups, brainstorming and mind mapping, group activities and individual exercises. PAR groups are generally made up of participants from the identified community co-working with researchers (often who are also from the same community). Participation may happen at varying levels dependent upon the community involved; ideally the PAR group would be involved at all levels and stages of the research process.

An example of the PAR group method being applied begins with identification of an issue and a community who have raised and are motivated to address the concern. Community members are then approached by a researcher (or sometimes the community will initiate contact with a researcher) usually through existing relationships to discuss an idea, solution or project they want to progress. The PAR group will then co-construct the project with the researcher as the group are the experts about their own community. This begins with reflection and planning including such things as identification and clarification of the issue, who should be involved, how the research process should happen (including research activities), where it could take place and other such issues. The next stages are action and observation whereby the research process is trialled and reviewed with a pilot group from the community and feedback gathered as to its effectiveness, impacts and outcomes. Another way of increasing participation and community capacity is to involve members of the identified community as researchers through mentoring and training. They can also be involved in the analysis, writing and distribution of the information and learning (Figure 1).

Eruera & Dobbs (2009, p. 51) worked with a taitamariki PAR group to co-construct their project on taitamariki Māori intimate partner relationships. The researchers were able to find out from taitamariki Māori how best to engage with other taitamariki Māori in research on their intimate partner relationships which included ascertaining:

- Taitamariki Māori definitions of intimate partner relationships and their views on what constitutes a healthy relationship.
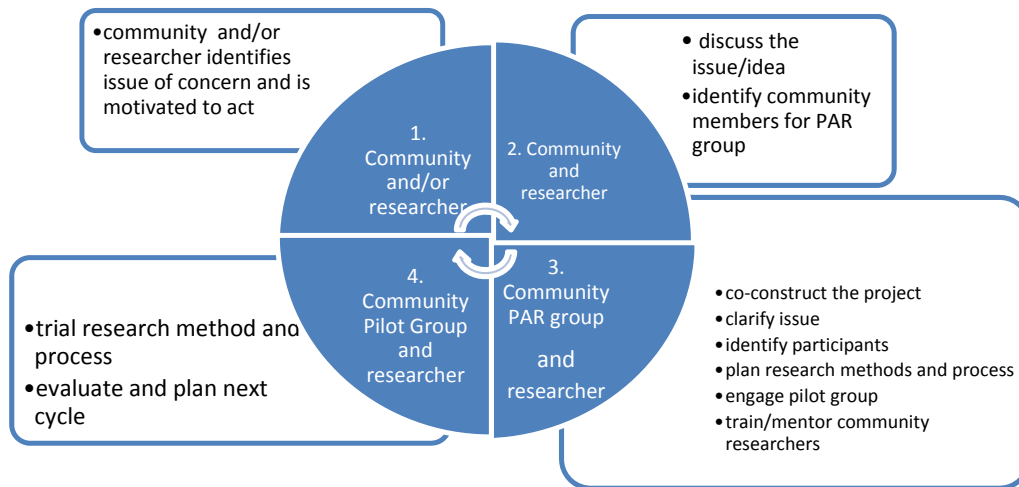
Figure 1. Cycle 1 community participatory action research (PAR)

- How best to engage taitamariki Māori in research on this topic so that they feel comfortable and safe.
- The best words and questions to use to find out about how taitamariki Māori experience intimate partner relationships.
- The best words and questions to use to find out about how to prevent violence in intimate partner relationships for taitamariki Māori.

The project also sought to:
- Ensure taitamariki Māori full participation in research on matters which affect their lives.
- Ensure that the project was carried out *with* taitamariki Māori and not *on* them.
- Use a methodology that enhanced taitamariki Māori wellbeing and reflected a Kaupapa Māori focus.
- Ensure that taitamariki Māori voices were being heard within this field of research.
- Acknowledge that without taitamariki Māori voices being heard any prevention programmes will fail them.
- Trial the findings with a pilot group of taitamariki Māori.
- Write recommendations for a full study.

PAR is congruent with the principles of Kaupapa Māori research (as described below) and has the potential to achieve positive outcomes for Māori whānau, hapū and iwi.

Kaupapa Māori analysis

Cram (2006) describes Kaupapa Māori within the Aotearoa context as:

> an emancipatory theory and has grown up alongside the theories of other groups who have sought a better deal from mainstream society; for example, feminist, African-American and worldwide indigenous peoples... . Kaupapa Māori addresses the oppression of Māori in our own land and the breeches of the Treaty of Waitangi guarantees of tino rangatiratanga. In this way it is unique. (p. 34)

Many Māori researchers have written about Kaupapa Māori research and the principles that underpin quality research with Māori (e.g., Cram; 2006; Smith; 1999). Smith (2006) suggests that

> Kaupapa Māori research encourages Māori researchers to take being Māori as a given, to think critically and address structural relations of power, to build upon cultural values and systems and contribute research back to communities that make a more positive difference or are transformative. (p. 24)

From her literature review on Māori research Bevan-Brown (1998, pp. 231–240) listed 10 components of Kaupapa Māori research:

- It must be conducted within a Māori cultural framework. This means stemmed from a Māori worldview, based on Māori epistemology and incorporate Māori concepts, knowledge, skills, experiences, attitudes, processes, practices, customs, reo, values and beliefs
- It must be conducted by people who have the necessary cultural reo, subject and research expertise required
- It should be focused on areas of importance and concern to Māori people, out of self-identified needs and aspirations
- It should result in some positive outcome for Māori
- It should involve the people being researched as active participants at all stages of the research process
- It should empower those being researched
- It should be Māori controlled
- It should be accountable to the people they research in particular the Māori community in general
- It should be of a high quality, assessed by culturally appropriate methods and standards
- The methods, measures and procedures used must take full cognisance of Māori culture

PAR as described in the previous sections aligns easily with these imperatives as it shares the principles of emancipation, self-determining communities, effecting social change, acknowledging and transforming participants expertise into solutions, meaningful participation, community development and capacity building, collaboration and ownership. PAR has not, however, been constructed from a Māori worldview and therefore is not founded in a tangata whenua-centred position but when applied by Māori using 'tikanga Māori' or customary practices, knowledge and skills, it has the potential to meet the needs of many Māori research projects including those with whānau.

When considering best-practice research methods to capture whānau realities, it is necessary to consider what that means within the context of today's society. Durie (2001) has written extensively about the changing nature of whānau in response to the evolving national and global society that we live in. He raises issues of whānau diversity and new understandings about who and what constitutes whānau in order to ensure approaches for working with whānau are equally as diverse, responsive, accessible and do not further marginalise or exclude whānau members participation. As PAR processes are guided and informed by the expertise of participants about their own situation it provides the potential for diversity of research process and tools. Therefore whānau would choose and design processes they believe would maximise participation, mutual benefits and positive solutions for themselves.

Implementation of Participatory Action Research (PAR) group in pre-testing with whānau

The following provides a summary of a whānau PAR group practice example used in pre-testing for this project.

Context

Over the years many marae have found it increasingly difficult to re-engage whānau back to participate in marae and hapū activities. Over more recent years, our marae has been challenged by this same issue. As part of a fundraiser for new buildings, a series of five kapa haka wananga were held and approximately 40 to 60 hapū members attended. The wananga had many positive outcomes for both individuals and the hapū collectively and motivated participants to begin to discuss continuing with other similar activities.

Preparation

At the conclusion of the final marae kapa haka wananga a hui was held which gave an opportunity to have an initial kōrero with those whānau and hapū members present to explain this research project and seek engagement of some members to attend a PAR group. The engagement was made by the author as the researcher using existing relationships as an 'insider researcher', that is, a researcher from the same community as the participants. Arrangements were then made to hold a hui which included dates, time and venue, with an open invitation being given to all present at the event. Details were then confirmed by email with a copy of the information sheet attached which enabled them to familiarise themselves with the project prior to attending the meeting.

Whānau hui

The hui took place at a whānau home with whakapapa whānau members from three generations in attendance which included Karani Papa, Matua and Mokopuna, a total of nine participants in this whānau PAR group. Not all these whānau live in the same whare but had come together for this purpose. The hui was opened with karakia and mihi, an overview of the project, signing of consents and a time for questions and clarification. A short explanation of the PAR method was given, an outline of the process for the hui and a choice of information gathering tools particularly due to the broad range of age groups present in the hui. The whānau chose two different processes; the taitamariki wanted to work through the process as a group on big sheets of paper and the adults wanted to kōrero as a group. The issue that was chosen for the purposes of the pre-testing was "how can we get whānau more involved in marae activities?" This has been an ongoing issue for this whānau, their marae and hapū. The objective for the whānau PAR group was to consider how best to engage other whānau in order to have input into this issue as well as inform the research project. The group then split and worked separately on their questions, taitamariki in one group and adults in the other. Both groups completed their tasks and came back together to kōrero and feedback their ideas. The hui was then closed with karakia.

The next phase to this process could be to analyse the information gathered and then use it to test the whānau PAR group recommendations with a pilot whānau group prior to beginning the full implementation phase of the project. However, for the purposes of this project the findings have not been reported, just the participants' experiences of the method used, the PAR group.

Feedback from the whānau

1. Did the whānau enjoy their experience of being involved in 'research' using the method?

Overall when reflecting on the process with whānau participants they were positive about their experience of the PAR method and process used. They felt happy to be asked to participate in a project which they knew would directly benefit them and contribute to positive outcomes for their whānau, hapū and marae. They felt it imperative that whānau be involved and participate in the initial thinking and planning of a whānau research project, particularly as they had just completed a series of successful wananga and were all wanting to continue with activities to further engage hapu members. They enjoyed being asked their opinion and drawing upon their own individual and collective ideas and solutions. One of the core messages about whānau participation was "whānau members know their family" (wahine) therefore are aware of the complexities to be considered to facilitate meaningful engagement processes and information gathering tools.

As the whānau PAR groups took place in whānau homes they were relaxed and comfortable with the environment and enjoyed working through the process with food and drinks made available. Different perspectives came from different whānau members; this was particularly noticeable with the variation in ages.

In the whānau PAR group where the taitamariki and adults split into two groups it was noticeable that the taitamariki were less engaged than the adults. This may have been due to the relevance of the issue to taitamariki or the fact that they were left to facilitate their own discussions. This process may be enhanced by having a second researcher available when working with a large whānau PAR group. It is valuable and adds a depth of information when having a range of whānau member perspectives contributing to the process particularly as taitamariki voices are often excluded from research processes and they must be seen as valued and important members of the whānau collective.

2. What feedback did they give you about the method – both positive and negative?

As the whānau PAR group process asked about how to engage other whānau the content of their discussions was valuable and may have been able to inform this project. However as data collection was not the purpose of the pre-testing for this whānau collective's project this information has not been collected or included.

Whānau participation

Whānau gave positive feedback about the PAR method drawing on their knowledge, experience and insights into their own whānau, situations and dynamics. They also liked the fact that all whānau members were involved including taitamariki and that the process provided options for participation. They liked the idea of whānau being involved in all stages of the process and having the opportunity to actively participate by facilitating some parts of the process themselves as researchers.

Tikanga

There were differences in opinion about the implementation of tikanga throughout the process. The older whānau members, some who were native reo speakers felt it was important to practice tikanga, for example begin with karakia and mihimihi as it is a 'normal' process for them and contributes to the formal validation of the research process. The majority of the younger whānau members also agreed with this view however a small number felt that sometimes it formalises the process and creates a barrier that may further marginalise or reduce the participation of some whānau members not as proficient in "te reo me ona tikanga". This affirms the diversity of whānau and whānau members and the requirement to have them inform and guide the process to ensure it enables active and comfortable participation by all their whānau members.

Kaupapa
There was a lot of discussion about the kaupapa of the research and how the issue to be addressed would direct the whānau PAR group in deciding on the appropriate processes and whānau members to involve. For example, if the kaupapa was about taitamariki then they would be the key whānau members to participate supported and inclusive of other whānau members. A few whānau participants felt that the kaupapa needed to be clear and specific and perhaps given to them to think about prior to the hui in order for them to fully contribute.

3. Did they think that other whānau would consent to being involved in research using the method?
The majority of participants agreed that other whānau would consent to being involved in research using the whānau PAR group method however as explained below this was dependent on engagement and relationships.

Researchers
Initial engagement of whānau often depends on who is requesting participation and their relationship with the whānau. All of the participants agreed that the researchers must be Māori and have some connection and commitment to: the whānau, the hapū, the rohe or at the very least to the iwi. They must be familiar with the community or co-work with someone who is able to guide them through the dynamics of the whānau or community. This was reinforced by one whānau member who stated "for our whānau the researcher can't be a kumara type Māori as our whānau will think they are a brown Pākehā and won't respond" (wahine).

Whānau diversity
As it is the whānau who co-designs the project and its implementation participants agreed that this process was flexible enough to respond to most whānau. Due to the diversity in whānau members the method also allows for a range of information gathering techniques to be used.

Policy

There are many ways in which PAR can inform policy development. It has the potential to advance the implementation of whānau-centred processes to find whānau solutions for whānau identified issues. Therefore policy can be informed by evidence of those whānau practices and processes that are currently working or that have achieved successful outcomes. The solutions that can be integrated into policy are coming from the whānau and communities themselves rather than a top-down approach. The capacity for social change and whānau ora (whānau holistic well-being) is great.

Summary and discussion

In summary, PAR and particularly PAR groups are proving to be very effective in research with Māori and this is evidenced by the increased use of this approach with taitamariki Māori projects over the past few years. PAR has potential for use within whānau Māori research projects when a meaningful collaborative process is used which enables the co-construction of the project from the 'inside out' that is, *by* whānau *for* whānau. PAR principles align with many of the Kaupapa Māori principles of self-determination, kaitiakitanga and others; however, PAR is not founded within a Māori worldview. Therefore tikanga processes must be included in use of the approach while balancing the tensions highlighted by a small number of whānau members as previously mentioned in the pre-testing. PAR is able to respond to the diversity of whānau Māori and has the ability to progress whānau development and whānau ora in Māori communities.

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