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In a farewell post to friends and colleagues on the CAE listserv in May 2017, Catherine Emihovich confided, "Like many of you, I was shocked by the outcome of the recent 2016 election...I see now that feelings of hatred of the 'other' and fear of the unknown that change brings are far deeper and more pervasive than I ever imagined, and that simply writing about social justice from our 'safe spaces' in the universities just won't do the work that needs to be done. I am now convinced that the only research worth doing in our field is the kind that goes by different names: community based action research (CBAR), participatory action research (PAR), etc."

As I read her post, Emihovich's words struck a chord with my own emerging perspective on academic research, particularly because I was struggling at the time to make sense of data from a Participatory Action Research project I conducted during the 2014-2015 academic year with a group of nine Latinx immigrant youth in a sixth grade classroom in Northern California. Although a central aim of the PAR Project was to engage marginalized students in a pedagogical approach that would develop students' capacity for community engagement, by the end of the academic year the students had not completed an Action Plan based on the research they had conducted in their community that year. On the one hand, I knew that my attempt to embed

Participatory Action Research in a middle school classroom had failed to achieve a central criterion of a successful PAR Project (i.e., an Action Plan designed by the students). Moreover, throughout the academic year, I had never completely erased the binary of the researcher/researched in my relationships with the students, and I found that I wasn't able to construct a truly shared understanding of the PAR project with the classroom teacher. Nevertheless, on the other hand, I wholeheartedly agreed with Emihovich's premise that academic research is most significant when university researchers design their research *with* the participants of their study, rather than conducting research *on* participants or *for* participants. How then, I wondered, might a university researcher overcome the challenges of collaborating with the multiple stakeholders involved in a classroom-based PAR project to achieve the civic outcomes that are certainly possible?

In this paper, I provide a case example exploring the complex relationships negotiated by a university researcher when PAR is conducted in a public school setting in order to better theorize how the positionality of PAR stakeholders effects classroom-based Participatory Action Research. I argue that despite a shared commitment to social justice and educational equity, the different positionalities of the university researcher and classroom teacher not only shaped each stakeholder's relationship to Participatory Action Research, but also led to competing academic motivations in the classroom that undergirded the ultimate shortcomings of the project.

Theoretical Framework: The Dialogic Spiral within PAR

By blurring the boundary between researcher and researched, PAR has long been recognized as a socially just mode of inquiry that intentionally breaks from the extensive history of educational and social science research that has, at best, conducted research for the main

purpose of advancing researchers' personal careers and professional ambitions or, at worst, objectified minoritized and disenfranchised communities and perpetuated discourses of deficit and deficiency about the people within these communities. Recent scholarship on Participatory Action Research has also challenged researchers to fundamentally shift their understandings of knowledge construction in addition to altering the relationship between the researcher and researched. Drawing from Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, Kinloch and San Pedro (2014) argue that knowledge is co-constructed when meaning is shared, expanded, altered and revised during the back and forth exchange that occurs in a dialogic spiral. Therefore, when conducting PAR with youth, the university-researcher does not simply learn about or learn from the students' experiences, but rather creates knowledge with students through a collaborative inquiry in which university-researcher and student-researchers interact and engage with an idea together.

My initial entry into the field was guided by the goal of creating a dialogic spiral with students during the research process. Moreover, when designing this research project, my aim was to conduct Participatory Action Research with students in a classroom setting. I was interested in exploring how PAR might be embedded within a classroom curriculum, rather than set apart as a peripheral project separate from the central focus in schools on standardized teaching and learning.

Fieldwork Site and Research Methods

I first met with the principal of the school in August 2014 to discuss the idea of a Participatory Action Research project focused on civic engagement.   The principal introduced me to the Literacy Coach at the school, a highly qualified, innovative teacher who had been

assigned a sixth grade English Language Arts class comprised of nine English Learners, all native Spanish speakers, who were reading between kindergarten and third grade level.

For a little more than two hours each day, the teacher worked with the same group of students for two consecutive instructional periods and an advisory session. She agreed that I could join the group during that time twice a week and, during one of the academic periods each day, work with a small group of four or five students on the Participatory Action Research project. From the beginning of the school year until the winter break in December, I focused the small group work developing the Participatory Action Research Project: learning about student-led civic research projects, discussing photography skills, identifying strengths and problems in students' neighborhoods with photography, analyzing the photographs through writing, developing interview questions for community members and summarizing interview results.

Then, in the beginning of December 2014, the project took an unexpected turn when an ongoing collaboration between the school principal and a Rabbi from the Jewish congregation located directly across the street from the public school resulted in an invitation to bring together a small group of middle school students from the public school and the private Jewish day school. When I was invited by the school principal to participate in this additional project I agreed to help facilitate the group with the understanding that I would continue to advance the PAR project with the same group of students and develop an Action Plan to address one of the problems the students had identified during PAR that fall.

In the after-school setting seven of the nine Latinx students from the PAR project joined eight students from the Jewish day school. Once the project shifted to the after-school setting,

however, the focus on the development of an Action Plan dissolved as the facilitating Rabbi and I realized it was necessary to build communication and collaboration between the two groups after our initial icebreakers generated much silence between the 15 participating students. Therefore, we designed experiential team building activities for each session, including soccer games, a hike in a nearby state park, a student guided tour of the Synagogue, a Spanish lesson, a collaborative poetry writing exercise, and a Saturday morning Earth Day event. Unfortunately, the original focus on the PAR project was gradually abandoned because we were never able to develop enough rapport between the two groups to genuinely develop a collective Action Plan. Moreover, although I continued to conduct participant-observation in the classroom, once the students began participating in the after-school program the classroom teacher wanted to focus instructional time on the English literature being covered in the classroom. To some extent I understood her perspective. The class was, after all, an English Language Arts course, and she wanted the students to finish the same novels as the other sixth grade classes at the school. In the end, although I finished the academic year conducting participant-observation in the classroom and collaborated with the teacher on several classroom activities related to the PAR project, the initial research objective of implementing an Action Plan based on students' community research was never achieved.

Positionality of PAR Stakeholders

I was thrilled in August 2014 when the principal of the school offered to introduce me to several classroom teachers to see if any would be interested in embedding a PAR project in their curriculum. I had already experienced two separate disappointing setbacks that summer when my preliminary research collaboration with a classroom teacher failed to solidify. In one case,

even though the classroom teacher and school principal were excited about the idea of incorporating PAR into the curriculum, the district superintendent failed to give final approval for the research project. It was never exactly clear why the project was denied, but I speculated that the superintendent was hesitant to approve such an explicitly political project in a district where public controversy about educational policy and practice was commonplace. The second possibility for a collaborative project ended just weeks before the school year began when the classroom teacher decided she didn't want to risk having "angry parents" asking her what she was doing in her classroom when she was supposed to be teaching English. In early August, I noted in my field notes, "One thing I have already learned is that teachers are not simply lazy and reluctant to incorporate PAR into the classroom because it is more work, research is scary!"

Originally, the principal of the middle school where I collaborated on the PAR project hoped that I would be able to work with the social science teachers so that a large percentage of the students at the school would have the opportunity to learn from the research process. After initial conversations about PAR, however, the social science teachers were adamant that they needed to focus instructional time on grade level standards. As one sixth grade teacher explained, she was required to teach ancient world civilizations that year and only spent a few days on democratic institutions at the end of the year when she covered Greece. It was only the Language Arts teacher who had been assigned a small class of nine students and provided with a double block of instructional time to work with the students who felt she could incorporate the project into her classroom. In my field notes I observed, "This project is only getting started because of the AMAZING principal and the open minded, progressive teacher. When reaching

out to the other teachers they thought it was a great idea, but felt they couldn't 'fit it in.' A nice idea, but they said they couldn't 'give up' teaching time."

My initial difficulty finding a teacher interested in the PAR project and the recurring negative reactions to the project from classroom teachers highlight why the institutional positionality of teachers makes it difficult for them to collaborate on a PAR project. First, teachers feel an enormous amount of pressure to cover standardized content. Since they have limited professional autonomy any deviation from the prescribed standards is perceived as "giving up" instructional time to cover something that is not necessary. Second, teachers are very vulnerable to parent critiques. The teacher who backed away from the project as the beginning of the school year approached mentioned, "Maybe if I was tenured…." Teachers are genuinely fearful of the repercussions they will face if parents or administrators discover they are not teaching the mandated content. Therefore, even a progressive educator who agrees to collaborate on a PAR project is placed in a position of having to guard instructional time to cover mandated material.

At the same time, I was placed in a double bind given my positionality at the school. From the beginning, I was perceived as the facilitator of the PAR project since I had first contacted the school and initiated the project. Moreover, I initially assured the classroom teacher that this project would allow her to work with a small group of students in her class while I developed the PAR project because I had not wanted to burden the classroom teacher with any additional responsibilities. Since I had conceptualized the students as co-researchers--and not the classroom teacher--at first this did not seem problematic. However, once I was established as the facilitator, or the "teacher" in the eyes of the students, I found it exceedingly difficult to

develop a co-researcher relationship with the students in alignment with my theoretical perspective on conducting PAR with youth.

Although I quickly realized that students were looking to me for guidance as their PAR "teacher" and believed that I was responsible for directing the research, given my limited amount of time with the students I found it nearly impossible to shift this dynamic and foster a co-researcher approach to the project. My field notes throughout the year are filled with comments about the limited amount of time I had with students. In September I wrote, "I didn't have enough time to make the higher level critical thinking connections to the project and Esperanza Rising" (the book they were reading at the time.) In November, "So I was feeling a bit better about our progress when B. told me she didn't have time for me next week. It is such a problem but I think this project could come to something if she was just a bit invested." In January, "Students were super curious and I think I could have gone into more conversations with them but no time." Of course, the limited amount of time I was given to work with the students was directly related to the teacher's beliefs that the PAR project was not only my project, but also outside the required material that needed to be covered. That December, I reflected on the limitations of taking sole responsibility for the PAR project in my field notes: "She even said after class, 'it was nice to see it all coming together.' I just wanted more of a partnership with her. Sort of planning it out together but she is very hands off--she treats it as my project separate from her class. But we could have made direct connections to the curriculum."

Perhaps it was exactly because I was initially so impressed with the vision of the school principal, the supportive classroom environment and the passion of the teacher that I overlooked

the influence of the classroom teacher's institutional position on the development of the PAR project. Of course, I had always understood that as the Language Arts teacher she was required to develop students' reading and writing skills. Yet from my position, I felt that literacy skills were embedded in research--as were equally important critical thinking skills. At times in my field notes I noted the contradictory pedagogical approaches between myself and the classroom teacher. For example, in October I wrote, "B. said she just wanted them to 'read, read, read' and assumes this is a precursor to writing but I totally disagree! They are not going to learn to write if they don't practice. DAILY!" However, even as I scribbled furiously away in my field notes, from my position as an invited guest in the classroom I felt limited in my ability to challenge her approach to language arts instruction or push for more time to develop the PAR project.

Teachers as Co-Researchers

At the beginning of the academic year all stakeholders--including myself, the school principal, the classroom teacher and the students--were enthusiastic about the PAR project. Indeed, it is actually surprising that two passionate educators with a supportive principal and a small group of eager students would not be able to successfully complete a PAR project over the course of an entire academic year. My initial idea had been to create a space of inquiry as a co-researcher with the students, and while the need for collaboration with the teacher had been assumed, from the very beginning when the principal had introduced me to the other teachers PAR had been considered "my" research project that I would conduct with the students. As the year went on it became obvious that by only identifying the students as co-researchers--and not the classroom teacher--I had set up a dynamic in the classroom in which the teacher perceived the PAR project as time lost in the classroom. Perhaps if the teacher had been equally invested

in the research project as part of a PAR team of researchers from the beginning, the PAR project

could have been embedded into the weekly curriculum in a manner that both increased students'

reading and writing abilities as well as led to the successful completion of an Action Plan.