

RESEARCHING WITH COMMUNITIES: GROUNDED PERSPECTIVES ON ENGAGING COMMUNITIES IN RESEARCH, ANDY WILLIAMSON & RUTH DESOUSA (EDS). MUDDY CREEK PRESS, AUCKLAND & LONDON 2007; TABLES, CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES, BIBLIOGRAPHIES; PAPERBOUND; PP 413.

Researching with Communities: Grounded Perspectives on Engaging Communities in Research represents a paradigmatic shift from the more conventional approaches of researching communities as objectified research subjects. As a research practice it significantly augments the realisation that social research is a situated, cultural practice, attuned to individual, cultural and ethical characteristics of a group of people researching shared interests together. Such a shift raises new questions, generates new methods and sees social research resource new forms of social change and progression.

Williamson and DeSouza have brought together twenty-six case studies that describe research approaches of bringing 'the community' into research enterprises as active participants. In some cases the researchers are brought into a community's self determined initiative. It is refreshing, informative, current and engaging reading. The text is to be highly recommended to fellow social researchers, teachers of social research, community participants, students and consultants. It also has significant value to experienced as well as potential commissioners of participatory research strategies.

Following the editors' scene setting introductions, the book is divided into three sections: 'Engaging with Communities' describes strategies for establishing and maintaining co-researching relationships; 'Research as a Living Partnership' explores how participatory research as a form of inter-relationship stretches the expectations and capabilities of all participants; and 'Methodology and Process' reconsiders essential concepts and elements of research within co-researcher relationships and frameworks.

The case studies cross many different fields of application including health, community development, conflict and disaster, information technology, spirituality and population displacements. The locations cross the globe from Asia-Pacific, Europe, Africa and the Americas. Australian practitioners will be encouraged to see so

much innovative work being carried out in Australia particularly in relation to Indigenous communities.

The binding thread throughout is as the inside page states: 'undertaking research in ways that promote and privilege the voice of community, is respectful of local or indigenous practices and is culturally safe'. Each author expresses commitment to establishing environments that enable lay parity in inquiry design, delivery and utility and also to explore how barriers to such environments persist in reflexivity about research practice as well as research outcomes. It is clear that researching with communities is not a solution to oppression so much as a way of self critically joining with those enduring oppression so that the wisdom of the oppressed may go towards transforming their own condition.

Researching with Communities is powerful in its mapping of a maturation of the action research field. It describes initiatives that go beyond linear models of research methodology to principle-based, whole system and emergent approaches and outcomes. The authors describe this maturation in grounded, accessible language. The observations, reflections and self-directed questions energetically communicate an inspiring and indeed, encouraging map of the action research field. This book is a solid stepping-stone into a confident and capable action research future for both communities and those who work with them alike.

SUSAN GOFF

ACTION LEARNING ACTION RESEARCH ASSOCIATION