

Re-membering exclusions: participatory action research in public institutions

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Abstract:

At a political moment when democracy, dissent and participation are under siege, especially in low-income communities of color, we write this article to reveal how participatory action research (PAR) can be joined with a larger democratic project to re-member institutions and communities exiled today in neoliberal society. This article draws on two large-scale PAR studies conducted in a women's maximum security prison and in a series of racially desegregated public high schools to explore the power, strategic moves and difficulties of PAR within public institutions. Arguing that PAR offers a theory of method for democratic research, we enter two participatory research collaboratives: a four year, qualitative and quantitative study of the impact of college in prison on the women students, the prison environment, prisoners' postrelease outcomes and civil society, and an ongoing qualitative and quantitative study of how race, ethnicity, class, and academic opportunities and outcomes are (inequitably) distributed in public schools.