

Collaboration in research: Insights from a participatory art project in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This chapter builds on debates regarding the conceptual and empirical contribution of participatory arts towards fostering social justice. It achieves this by addressing issues of epistemic (in)justice and hierarchical power in community-based research. While offering a conceptual argument on the potential of art-based research in enhancing human development for social justice and well-being, the chapter also demonstrates the limitations of participatory research in realising the parity of participation commonly referred to as collaboration and equal partnership. We use the capability approach as a normative evaluative framework with its emphasis on an environment that expands citizens' freedoms to choose and effectively participate in a life they value. We draw on a collaboration project with 12 Tonga rural youth in Zimbabwe to discuss methodological processes of participatory arts using graffiti on board as a method of engagement. Simultaneously, we draw on experiences of collaboration and partnership with local civil society organisations in addressing complex challenges of exclusion within communities. The chapter draws on Nancy Fraser's approach to the need for recognition to clarify the conditions necessary to build a just society and highlights the exclusionary practices experienced by the Tonga youth as unjust. The chapter concludes by reinforcing the idea that collaborations and partnerships with excluded groups are among the conditions necessary to achieving the desire for recognition in marginalised contexts.