

Chapter 44

Framing and Exposing Community Issues through Video Participatory Research: An Emerging Approach for Adult Education

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ABSTRACT

Video participatory research (VPR) is an emergent methodology that bridges visual methods with the epistemology of participatory research. This approach is motivated by the “crisis of representation” or “reflective turn” (Gubrium & Harper, 2013) that promotes research conducted with or by participants, conceptualizing research as praxis (Lather, 1991). In this manuscript, the authors argue that VPR can be used to explore issues directly impacting individuals involved with adult education and vocational training. Primary investigators work with community co-researchers to document issues in the community, analyze this audio-visual material, and produce and distribute video projects, exposing policy makers and key stakeholders to a community’s concerns. When implementing the VPR process research teams account for intentionality of form and content, apply a multi-perspective analysis to the complex layers of data produced by video, and plan for distribution of work on the personal and local level as well as in the public sphere (i.e., at the micro and macro level).

INTRODUCTION

We live in a digital world, where individuals have increased access to information via the Internet and social media, and citizens are often oversaturated with visual images (Bauerlein, 2011; Palfrey & Gasser, 2016). The expansion of technology and increased exposure to online material, as well as the recognition

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-7706-6.ch044

of visuals as “texts,” provides unique opportunities for researchers interested in examining the potential use of multimedia formats as research methodologies (Bogdan & Biklin, 2007; Gubrium & Harper, 2013; Prosser, 2011). Current digital conditions, potentials, and obstacles raise essential questions for research and practice; Who is creating and disseminating knowledge? Who has access to knowledge? What do we know about the complexity of audiovisual production material and its relevance to research? How can these issues impact educational research?

Educational research has also seen an emergence in scholarship that is conducted *with* or *by* individuals, in contrast to previous positivist approaches that conduct research *on* participants (Kincheloe, 2003; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011; Mirra, Garcia, & Morrell, 2016). This type of participatory research often evolves from the bottom-up, developing from an individual’s or group’s desire to understand an issue or phenomenon that directly impacts their social world. Lather (1991) referred to this as “research as praxis.”

Video participatory research (VPR) is a methodology that draws on digital and visual methods to help groups or individuals conduct community-based and participatory investigations. This approach places video cameras in the hands of those most often impacted by policy decisions, yet, who are often marginalized in these conversations and misrepresented in the media. Participants use video production to document issues in their community, analyze this audiovisual material, and produce and distribute video projects, exposing policy makers and key stakeholders to a community’s issue of concern. The goal is to produce content that can function as a springboard for community action. Implemented via the methods we discuss further below, video becomes a rhetorical device that affords the researcher multiple layers of data collection for analysis.

This manuscript examines the potential for using VPR to explore issues directly impacting individuals involved with adult education and vocational training. In particular, we argue that VPR can provide researchers and participants, an opportunity to co-research areas of concern that are prevalent in their daily lives. First, we will present an overview of the aspects of visual methodologies and participatory research that inform the VPR methodology. Then we will provide steps for implementing VPR, inspired by our own previous research. Finally, we make the case that VPR can serve as a tool to develop new knowledge in this field by asking new questions and privileging unheard voices.

FOUNDATIONAL INFLUENCES OF VPR

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) describe emergent methods as “state of the art” approaches that bridge the methods-theory gap (p. ix). These methods are often interdisciplinary approaches to understanding that transpire from within and outside traditional, academic spaces (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2008). For example, in the 1970s during the “crisis of representation,” or “reflective turn,” researchers began to adapt methodologies in efforts to become more reflective of their research practices and to increase participants’ agency in the research process (Gubrium & Harper, 2013; Pink, 2013). Methods were used to disrupt notions of “researcher” and “researched,” provide opportunities for individual agents to examine the issues of power and oppression directly impacting their lives, and offer a platform for using participatory research to contribute to theory-making. At the same time, researchers also began to use arts-based inquiry and visual methods to elicit and produce knowledge (Finley, 2005; Holm, 2008; Prosser, 2011). VPR is one such methodology that advances our understanding of the social world by combining the traditions of visual methods with the principles of participatory research.

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