

Participatory research in social care contexts

Prof. Anna Gupta



ROYAL
HOLLOWAY
UNIVERSITY
OF LONDON

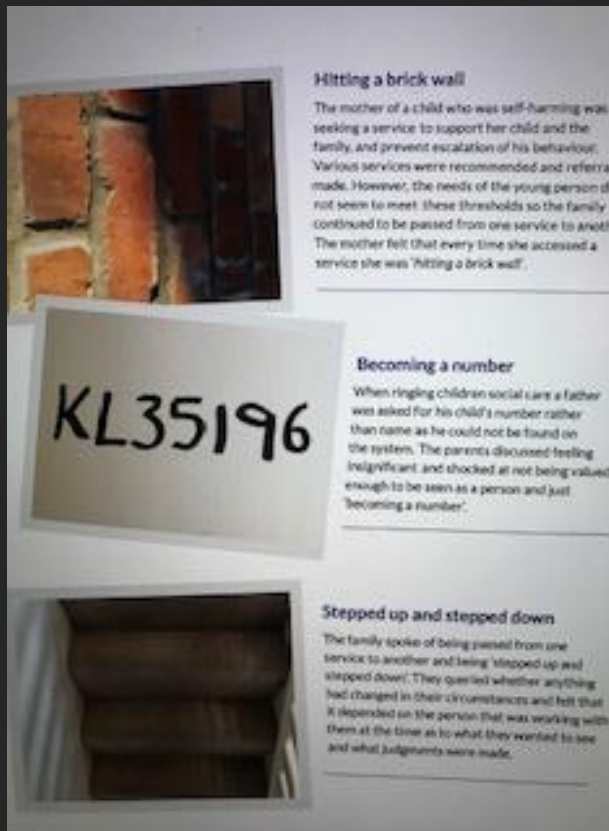
Participatory Research and Lived Experience

- Why do participatory research with people who have lived experience?
 - *'Participatory approaches arguably increase the validity of evidence, since they attempt to identify the concerns that matter to people directly affected by public policy'* (Humphries, 2003: 89)
 - *People who live in poverty know the solutions to their problems better than anyone else. Asking their opinions and giving them a voice is essential if we are to come to any true understanding of poverty and what can be done to address it* (ATD Fourth World family members)
 - *Conversations across 'divides' to open up new understandings, identify opportunities for coproduction and promote connections between groups who are often constructed in opposition* (Featherstone et al, 2018)

What do we mean by participatory research?

- Participation in research can take many forms – from participants in pre-defined research to co-investigators through the research process (participatory research)
- Participatory research comprises a range of methodological approaches and techniques, all with the objective of handing power from the researcher to research participants, who are often community members or community-based organisations.
- In participatory research, participants have control over the research agenda, the process and actions. Most importantly, people themselves are the ones who analyse and reflect on the information generated, in order to obtain the findings and conclusions of the research
- <https://participatesdgs.org/methods/>

Methods used in participatory research



-
- The participatory research studies use a range of techniques. These include:
 - focus groups and multi stakeholder meetings,
 - participatory action research,
 - oral testimonies and story collection,
 - photo- digital stories,
 - Photovoice and participatory video

Participatory research as a way of promoting social justice

- A key goal for participatory research has to do with the fact that it is typically those with less power who speak through the research process - people whose voices, agendas, and research do not (yet) count as valid knowledge contributions.
- Participatory research involves active participation by all and reflection through ethical, open and respectful relationships alert to power dynamics so that participants' voices, values, and insights are central to the process of investigation. Therefore, participatory approaches aim at doing research **with** and **alongside** rather than on and about.
- Even though projects may not always or even typically succeed in intervening in larger political processes, the aspiration is for more democratic and inclusive forms of knowledge-making.
- It is not easy – but can be so valuable for all involved



Some examples from my work



CAMDEN CONVERSATIONS

OUR FAMILY-LED CHILD PROTECTION ENQUIRY



What we hoped to achieve:

Camden child protection can change by being human

In an ideal world child protection conferences would be a conversation instead of a meeting



constructive dialogue

Backstory: 2014

Family Advisory Board in Camden is formed of local experts by experience

2016: creation of the



Co-designed and delivered by Annie from Surviving Safeguarding

HOW CAMDEN CONVERSATIONS HAPPENED:

Parents are finding the Child Protection process very difficult

I feel vulnerable and uncomfortable in child protection conferences

RESEARCH
Child Protection conferences are hard and quite official. They can feel very 'blaming'



PARENTS & RESEARCH FINDINGS

Let's try to find out more - to help families take care of their children



Let's use Camden Conversations to start a participatory research project

A PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH PROJECT IS BORN

The TEAM



Annie from Surviving Safeguarding



Family Advisory Board supported by social worker Tim Fisher



Professor Anna Gupta

CAMDEN CONVERSATIONS

coffee morning workshops



Starting a journey to a place of respect, learning and humane practice

Important to acknowledge that the system does harm

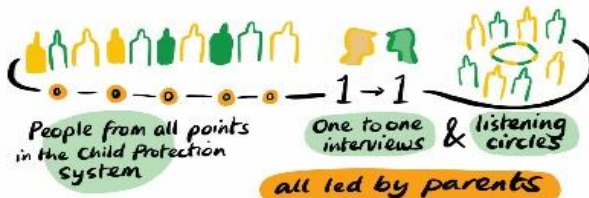
We are travelling in hope based on good intentions of individuals within the system

WITH PROFESSIONALS & FAMILIES

"An appreciative enquiry"

Who & what is involved?

50 people 25 families 25 professionals



These all took place between September 2017 and September 2018 at OUR SPACES



I never thought I would be back in this office sitting down, leading this conversation.

PARENT FEEDBACK

SESSION FEEDBACK

families
It was abuzz asking the questions, I felt like I learnt and they learnt

I am excited to hear the outcome and recommendations of the enquiry, for me this process has already been a success which has developed me as a practitioner

Professionals



Changing culture

Testing Advocacy

Peer Support

Learning Exchanges

Parent led workshops

We are already innovating!

HEADLINE AREAS FOR ACTION

- ADVOCACY PEER SUPPORT
- LEARNING EXCHANGE DEMONSTRATING FAMILY VOICES CAN LEAD TO CHANGE
- CP FORMAT & 'ATMOSPHERE'
- SUPPORT, INFORMATION AND OPPORTUNITY FOR PARENTS TO FEED BACK

Where could this journey take us?



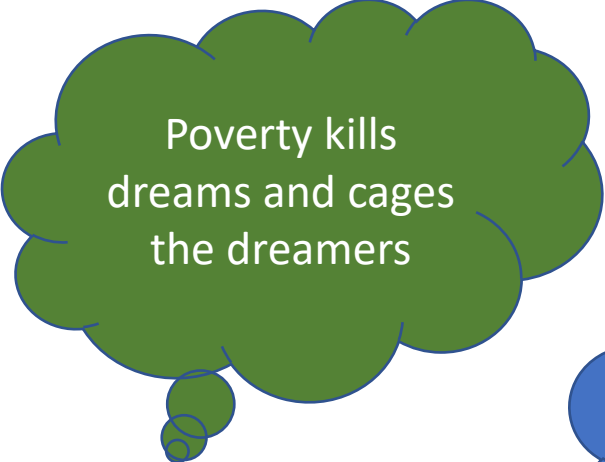
MORE HUMANE, A CONVERSATION

IN AN IDEAL WORLD...

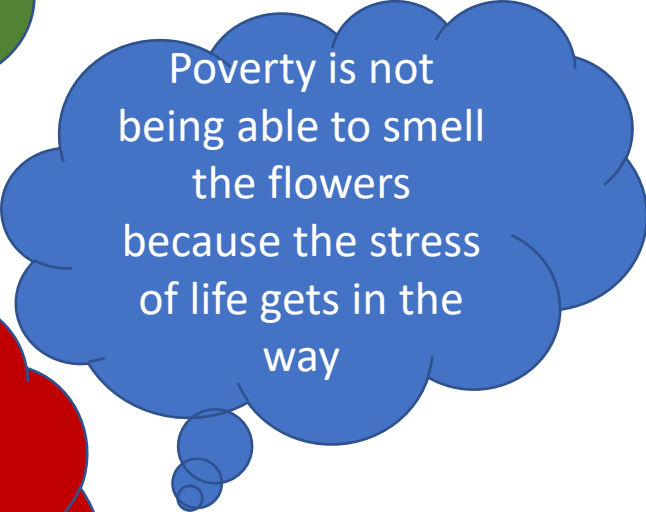
A CHANGE IN ATMOSPHERE

Understanding Poverty in All its Forms – 6 Dimensions: *A participatory research study into poverty in the UK (ATD Fourth World, 2019)*

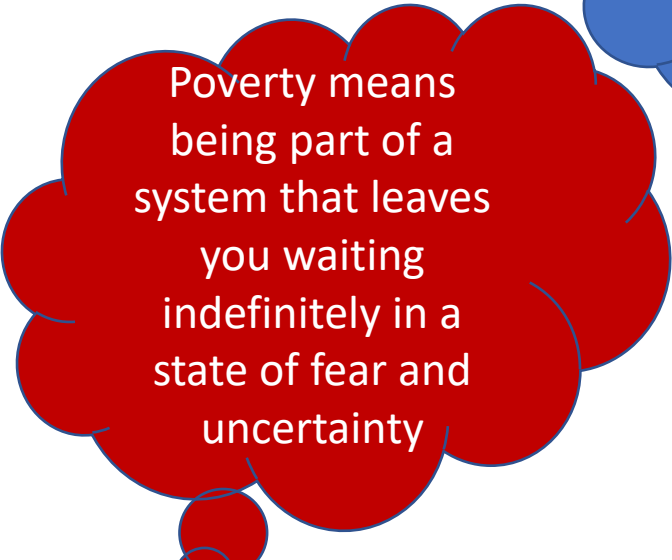
- Disempowering systems, structures and policies
- Stigma, blame and judgement
- Financial insecurity, financial exclusion and debt
- Lack of control over choices
- Damaged health and well-being
- Unrecognised struggles, skills and contributions



Poverty kills
dreams and cages
the dreamers



Poverty is not
being able to smell
the flowers
because the stress
of life gets in the
way



Poverty means
being part of a
system that leaves
you waiting
indefinitely in a
state of fear and
uncertainty

Seven
messages
were
identified:

1. **It is essential that people with lived experience participate** in tackling poverty. This requires time, careful planning and commitment.
2. **There is a need for better indicators of poverty** that emphasise and capture **the human experience of poverty**.
3. **Inadequate financial resources** are a cause of poverty that **take away control and shorten lives**.
4. **The impact of stigma and negative judgement is a particularly painful part of poverty**.
5. **Participants agreed services should be enabling and supportive**; but some services are experienced as controlling and oppressive.
6. **The skills and contributions** made to society by people in poverty **often go unrecognised**.
7. Individual resilience is no substitute for **better systems, structures and policies**.

The Adoption Enquiry

The Enquiry demonstrated that the differing stakeholders in adoption welcomed the opportunity to discuss with, and learn from, each other and suggests the need for such opportunities to be continued.

It demonstrated that hopeful and helpful conversations are both possible and absolutely vital.



Challenges / Limitations (to name a few....)

Is it **real** research?

Relationships are central – power relationships can be complicated

Ensuring marginalised voices are truly heard

Ethical issues – confidentiality, boundaries etc.....

Payment complications

Setting up expectations

Effecting change