

Title: *Participatory Research in Mentoring Programmes – Discussing Tools and Putting them into Practice*

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1.204

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Number of participants: 6

Sequence of content/methods/activities:

The speakers put different postcards with images or sayings on the floor. The participants were asked to pick one card, which had strong associations to meaning of the word “participation” for them. The participants introduced themselves and explained why they had chosen their card.

A card with the statement: ‘Hi potentials – high potentials’ was chosen by a participant with the explanation, that mentees have different needs and require different mentoring forms according to their profile. A card, which illustrated a rickshaw, was associated with mentoring by its risky, adventurous sides.

Also an illustration with people on eye level was chosen because it was associated with mentoring by showing that mentor and mentee shouldn’t feel a strong hierarchy and that mentoring has to deal with participation. It turned out that participatory methods were rather new for many participants.

In the following 45 minutes, the facilitators presented theories of participatory research in mentoring programmes as well as a master thesis conducted with participatory research.

In the last part of the workshop, the ‘photo voice’ method was tested by the participants and discussed. The participants were asked the question: “From your personal point of view, what is the meaning of mentoring and befriending?” They had the instruction to discuss this question with a partner, to go for a walk and take a picture to answer the question.

Main tools/learnings presented by the facilitator:

Studies showed that participatory research is a suitable research method in mentoring because it is a joint process of exploration and establishing meaning. Both, mentors and mentees come up with their questions and opinions. It is the convergence of two perspectives, which have the same relevance. Hence, mentee and mentor are meeting as equals and the self-worth of mentees can be increased by giving them an active role in a research process and by paying intense attention to their ideas/associations/inputs.

Participatory research is empowerment for the mentoring process. It strengthens the relationship between mentee and mentor, it furthers resilience and through this, it helps the mentee to better cope with daily life.

One presented method was ‘photo voice’: People are asked a question referring to the research interest and have to answer it by taking a picture. For example, women who are involved in prostitution at the women’s meeting point ‘Olga’ in Kreuzberg were asked what sex work does with them. The women took pictures to answer the question. The photo voice pictures can lead to a dialogue which is initiated by the pictures.

This method gives an individual insight in their thinking process. It is not about language but another form of expressing. To start the reflection and the evaluation, individuals and also the group as a whole are asked what they associate with the pictures and which feelings they have by looking at them.

This exercise works best with a group of participants, not only one. The size of the group can be adjusted according to the research question: 8-10 people form a manageable group. It is important, that people feel confident to speak up in the group, hence a positive group atmosphere has to be created.

A second introduced method is 'social mapping': Participants make a drawing which shows important places in their everyday life in a map. The drawing process is followed by a conversation to explain the drawing. Questions are asked: "Why do you like the rooms, how do you get there?" The participants focus in this exercise on their personal self-location. Hence, they bring in their expert knowledge about their living into the research.

Main outcomes from the activities/methods applied:

The participants presented three pictures responding to the question: "From your personal point of view, what is the meaning of mentoring and befriending?"

They explained their own ideas and intentions in taking these pictures and then they discussed it with the group. One picture from the workshop showed a person at the information desk of the congress. This motive was supposed to illustrate the process of giving information and of acknowledging the need to get help.

The workshop facilitators explained that if you have more pictures than the ones which were produced in the workshop (3 pictures), the next steps would be to find a caption for the images, to sum them up, to organise them in groups and to bring them in a narrative structure.

Results of the Workshop:

- (1) Participatory research is a benefit for researchers and also practitioners. It involves mentors and mentees.
- (2) Participatory research methods are – like a bouquet of flowers – a wide collection of options and differ a lot in their potential and structure. Hence, for each project, you should choose what is helpful to answer your questions.
- (3) Also the evaluation process can and should be participatory (see Jackson).
- (4) Professional categorisations, which describe the different levels of participation can help to monitor own projects and find out which participatory level they have and which ones they should achieve.

One thing that was laughed about:

„Discussing pictures with the photo voice method in participatory research is like a group therapy?!“

Reference of literature:

Hella von Unger: *Partizipative Forschung: Einführung in die Forschungspraxis*. 2014.