Outsider Positioning in Action Research

Struggling with Being on the Outside Looking in

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My Role

- An outsider entering a setting to collaborate with a group of insiders in order to facilitate change
  - Multiprofessional Teams in Residential Care Facilities
  - Interagency groups – children’s services, health and social care agencies working in socially excluded areas
  - Interorganisational groups – tourism networks, education providers & employers
Outsider Positioning

Initial Positioning – On the Outside Looking in

- Lack of knowledge about individuals, structures, politics, culture and jargon

Shifting Sands – Negotiating Insider/Outsider Boundaries

- Insiders – question taken-for-granted assumptions
- Outsiders – gain knowledge
Theoretical Framework

- Positioning on a spectrum (Bartunek 2008, Ritchie et al. 2009)
- Social identity is defined by Tajfel (1981 p.255) as: “that part of the individuals’ self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership”.

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Struggling with Moving from the Outside in

- Explorations to gain knowledge may stir up issues
- Difficult to identify champions
- ‘Expert’ status - paradox – wielding power to empower others
- Knowledge gained but objectivity lost?
- Sustainability
Making the most of outsider positioning

Reflexivity!

1. Develop a critical awareness of one’s position
2. Critical reflection on power within and outside the group
3. Focus on promoting positivity and developing trust
Develop a critical awareness of one’s position

- How does socially identifying more with a group impact on research?
- Discussion/Negotiations on role
Critical reflection on power within and outside the group

- Reflection on one's own power
- Reflection on appropriate use of this power
- Awareness of the power of others
- Awareness of potential to disempower others (Stewart and Rigg 2011)

As an outsider: Accentuate value of practical knowing, acknowledge one’s limitations in this regard, ensure voices of all participants heard and valued

- Reflect on organisational/institutional influences
Focus on promoting positivity and developing trust

- Fresh perspective an advantage
- Short term achievable objectives
- Develop trust/ sense of safety within group
  - Actively seek input from all
  - Acknowledge that there will be difficulties/conflict
  - Acknowledge limitations
  - Strive for clarity in roles/decisions
  - Respect diverse views
  - Transparency
Negotiating outsider positioning is a continual learning experience