Pedagogy in Action

Rethinking Ethnographic Training and Practice in Action Anthropology

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ABSTRACT: While anthropology students may receive general instruction in the debates and critiques surrounding public and/or engaged anthropology, attention to the growing intersection between participatory action research (PAR) and anthropology is often overlooked. I contend that to think of PAR as a complementary approach to conventional anthropological fieldwork (i.e. interviews, participation observation, and focus groups) is problematic in that it runs counterintuitive to the former's transformative logic. Drawing from my work co-leading a radio-based partnership project with urban Inuit organisations in Montreal and Ottawa, I repurpose Sol Tax's 'action anthropology' to discuss an attitudinal shift that our team's use of PAR has provoked, reconceptualising the aims and practice of our ethnographic enquiry in the process. I consider the effects of this shift for anthropological training and pedagogy in PAR projects and propose the use of 'training-in-character' as an organising principle for the supervision of student research.

KEYWORDS: action anthropology, ethnography, participatory action research, pedagogy, supervision, training, urban Inuit

In a recent article, Budd Hall and Rajesh Tandon (2017), noted educationalists and pioneers of community-based research, describe an implicit paradox shaping pedagogy in participatory research today. As they put it, participatory research has never been more popular with different kinds of community-university partnerships and facilitative structures meeting what they call a 'huge appetite' for community-based participatory research internationally (Hall and Tandon 2017: 372). However, they point out that the institutional structures through which these aspirations are being operationalised often produce more problems than they solve – for example, not only do universities remain the dominant actor in the majority of such partnerships but there is a broad lack of opportunities for training in partnership research. 'Again,' they state, 'research shows a strong desire to learn how to do community-based-participatory re-

search, but then there are few opportunities at either the university or on the civil society side to benefit from systematic study' (Hall and Tandon 2017: 372).

Building on Hall and Tandon's concern, I use this article to think through the conjunction of participatory action research (PAR) with anthropology and the challenges that I argue it presents for ethnographic practice and student training. An increasing number of anthropologists are choosing to use PAR in their projects (Barab et al. 2004; Hemment 2007; Levinson 2017; Montreuil and Carnevale 2018; Stevenson 2014; Swantz 2008; Tacchi 2017; Tacchi et al. 2003; cf. Halse and Boffi 2016). One explanation for this popularity is the positive value associated with PAR's (perceived) role in enacting the 'action turn' in the social sciences. Since at least the 1970s, the 'action turn' has revised the nature and purpose of social scientific enquiry, placing greater emphasis

on the production of practical knowledge in research (Ospina and Anderson 2014). As Peter Reason and William Torbert put it in their pivotal argument for this turn to action, ‘since all humans are participating actors in their world, the purpose of inquiry . . . is to forge a more direct link between intellectual knowledge and moment-to-moment personal and social action, so that inquiry contributes *directly* to the flourishing of human persons, their communities, and the ecosystems of which they are part’ (2001: 5–6, italics in original). What is important to highlight in this definition is the understanding that a transformational social science is *not* primarily about action but about knowledge; more specifically, it is about the forging of an ‘epistemological break’ in how we know and interact with the world (Ospina and Anderson 2014: 19).

This commitment to knowledge is a key factor in understanding the uptake of PAR in anthropology. In brief, PAR is a change-oriented modality with deep global roots that has been applied in development work, educational settings and other domains for over forty years (Glassman and Erzem 2014; Swantz 2008). It emphasises the inclusion and participation of all relevant stakeholders to both the setting of the collaborative agenda and to a repeated cycle of planning, action and reflexive evaluation that aims to help people transform their worlds. While the character of each PAR project is ultimately shaped by its local setting, what all such projects share is the ‘participatory intent’ (Greenwood et al. 1993: 175) of bringing researchers and community members together as co-participants in the dialogical production of practical knowledge of everyday benefit to those involved.

This article has developed out of my engagement over the last six years in a PAR project with Inuit individuals and urban Inuit organisations in Montreal and Ottawa.¹ Called *Mobilizing Nipivut*,² the aim of the partnership has used the production of bi-weekly community radio shows to address the situation of urban Inuit (Morris 2016; Watson 2015). Nipivut, meaning ‘our voice’ in Inuktitut, is the name of the Inuit radio programme in Montreal that the partnership started to produce and broadcast in 2015 to fill a gap in community-identified needs;³ as a result of new funding, the partnership has now expanded to include Inuit in Ottawa in order to support the production of a separate show in that city. Drawing on the historical importance of community radio for Inuit life in the north (see Northern Quebec Inuit Association 1974), the Nipivut initiative has been about opening up a new dialogical space for Inuit within

cities and structuring a supportive environment for collective action against discrimination and other barriers that urban Inuit face by scaling up Inuit civic engagement and enhancing the opportunities for stakeholders to respond to Inuit voices (Watson 2017). The project has followed a PAR model by developing a committed systematic process that produces new knowledge by drawing from the experience of participants and ensuring that that knowledge enables its ‘producers’ (i.e. the participants) to act more capably in the world (cf. Ospina and Anderson 2015).

As an anthropologist, I can point to my learning with and from key community partners as an enduring relation that has significantly shaped my understanding of the possibilities but also the personal, institutional and disciplinary challenges of pursuing a PAR project. However, I question the dominant image of ‘PAR-with-Ethnography’ featured in the literature (Eisenhart 2019). By this, I refer to a pervasive assumption that characterises PAR and anthropology as two pre-existing fields which, in the hands of anthropologists, come into some form of combination, with each influencing but not necessarily changing the other. From the perspective of the Nipivut project, to treat PAR in anthropology as a complementary approach to the conventional *mise-en-scène* of fieldwork (i.e. interviews, participant observation and focus groups) runs counterintuitive to the transformative logic of the former for two main reasons.

First of all, a transformative process such as PAR cannot be undertaken without accepting that it will change the very process that creates the conditions for change (i.e. fieldwork); in other words, pursuing research within the context of action will change a project’s methodological approach, most often in non-linear and unexpected ways, as much as the situation at hand.

Second, and a consequence of the first point, PAR is a relational and pedagogical form of social praxis rather than an objective or instrumental tool of enquiry. Put simply, engaging in an action research project from an anthropological standpoint challenges one to continually negotiate, learn and adapt to what I will come to describe as an attitudinal shift in the aims, ideas and practice of ethnographic enquiry. This shift builds on the key understanding that my team and I have gained from the Nipivut partnership that bringing PAR into anthropology is *not* the same as employing another kind of instrumental method; rather, it is to initiate a change-oriented process of ‘collective self-reflective enquiry’ (Kemmis and McTaggart 1988: 1) that reconceptualises ethnographic practice itself as a form of action.

In what follows, I look to provide an alternative, convergent vision of PAR and anthropology that signifies a form of practice in which both fields are mutually transformed and enhanced. In the following section, I discuss my repurposing of the term ‘action anthropology’ (Tax 1975) to describe this form of practice. I also elaborate on an attitudinal shift in ethnographic enquiry that our project team’s use of PAR has provoked. I will then proceed in the second half of the article to discuss the provision of training pathways that aim to help ethnographic researchers develop a set of skills and competencies which meet the variable, processual and ‘messy’ demands of an action anthropological approach (Cook 2009).

Repurposing the Language of Action Anthropology

Action anthropology is a term that Sol Tax (1907–1995), the Chicago anthropologist, first coined publicly in 1951 (Tax 1975). In part a response to the colonial entanglements of applied anthropology and the means–end application of anthropological knowledge (Cobb 2019), Tax adopted the term action anthropology to describe a form of anthropological practice that emerged out of his organisation of a field-training programme for departmental students in a Meskwaki Indian settlement near Tama, Iowa.⁴ By design, Tax wanted students to disrupt the scientific model of anthropological fieldwork predicated on the ‘expert’ anthropologist extracting information from informants and disseminating objective knowledge about local life. In this new approach, the anthropologist was to ‘disclaim pure science’ and instead engage with a ‘clinical’ or ‘experimental’ method in the context of action that would help ‘a group of people to solve a problem’ and allow the anthropologist ‘to learn something in the process’ not from passive observation but from an informed and collaborative commitment to help make things happen (Tax 1975: 515).

For the 1950s, what Tax proposed was a radically different conception of the anthropological object of study. The Meskwaki were no longer the objects of analysis – ‘people are not rats and ought not to be treated like them’, Tax would write (1975: 515) – but active and equal participants in the production of practical knowledge about issues and problems that the Meskwaki themselves had identified as important (Daubenmier 2008). In effect, two principles set this ‘action’ approach apart from ‘applied’ anthropology. First of all, it valued the capacity of marginalised

and disadvantaged people to take control of their own situations and set in motion self-determined change (Tax 1975). This transformed anthropology into a ‘procedure without “ends”’ (Buswell 1961: 113) and emphasised the responsibility of the anthropologist ‘to help people convert their awareness of social need into social action’ (Bennett 1996: S36). Second, and crucially, it initiated (without, in my opinion, ever fully realising) a different understanding of ‘action’ – that is, moving away from the intentional application of anthropological theory for practical and instrumental purposes to ‘action’ as an ethically informed anthropological practice which became validation of the research itself not at the expense of anthropological learning, Tax (1975) argued, but actually to its benefit.

In spite of the contribution that Tax and his students made to the development of anthropological activism (see Stocking 2000), the concept of ‘action anthropology’ fell from disciplinary vocabulary during the 1970s.⁵ However, while action anthropology may have disappeared, the core values driving Tax’s theory of action continued to influence various proposals and debates well into the 1980s and beyond (Bennett 1996: S38; e.g. Warry 1992).⁶

I think it useful to repurpose Tax’s language of action here. Although Tax’s work predates the first iterations of PAR in the 1960s, his articulation of action was transformative of anthropological practice in ways that are strikingly similar to how we understand the valuation of the local – in terms of local knowledge and participant perspectives – in PAR today (Eisenhart 2019; Levinson 2017). In particular, Tax’s focus on respecting the capacity of Indigenous communities and others similarly marginalised and disempowered to make their own decisions had important implications for rethinking ethnographic practice as a form of action. As Joshua Smith explains, a primary distinction that Tax drew in regard to action anthropology was ‘largely to do with the locus of power, that is, acknowledging and divesting oneself of it . . . [so] to avoid denying or impeding peoples’ or persons’ abilities to determine their own destinies’ (2015: 446). This understanding of the autonomy and agency of local people underpinned the logic of Tax’s action method as operating in and through ‘mutual obligation’ (Smith 2015: 447), where informants became co-researchers and the anthropologists, standing with them, became their students (Bennett 1996). While I also acknowledge the ways in which Tax’s argument diverges from the principles of PAR,⁷ his model brought action and anthropological research into mutual relation and therefore reconceptualised

the very idea and aim of the researcher's practice. For this reason, I think it is useful to repurpose the term 'action anthropology' as a signifier of the contemporary convergence between PAR and anthropology. I now turn to how the use of PAR in the Nipivut project has reconceptualised our team's ethnographic practice and then discuss the implications of action anthropology for research training.

The Nipivut ('Our Voice') Project and Attitudinal Shifts in Ethnographic Practice

When the first Nipivut radio show was broadcast from CKUT90.3FM, the campus-community radio station in Montreal, on 6 October 2015, it became the first Inuit radio show to be broadcast from a southern city to a southern city in Canada.⁸ Montreal Inuit had identified a radio show as a community need at a national meeting of urban Inuit organisations in 2005 (see Tungasuvvingat Inuit 2006). This need reflects a quickly growing Inuit population across southern Quebec but particularly in Montreal. Since the 1970s, the city has become an important location for Inuit from Nunavik (northern Quebec) and the three other Inuit land claims regions in northern Canada to access quality health care, post-secondary education and employment opportunities; it has also become a place to follow family members. Inuit organisations estimate the Inuit population in Montreal to be over 1,000, making it the fifteenth community of Inuit in Quebec and, in terms of population, one of the biggest.⁹ Alongside an emergent middle class, however, troubled mobilities of escape and refuge also define a broad range of Montreal Inuit experiences, over 40 per cent of the Aboriginal homeless population in the city are Inuit, for example (Kishigami 2008).

The original radio team consisted of myself and three Inuit co-researchers on the project supported by a community advisory board. The purpose of the show was three-fold: to connect Inuit north and south, especially connecting family members with those who had gone missing in the city; to promote the use and learning of Inuktitut in Montreal; and to combat the prevalent negative stereotypes of Inuit in the media, particularly urban media, by making the Nipivut show, radio by Inuit for Inuit. All these reasons served a greater purpose of re-storying Inuit life in the city—that is, to assert Inuit as not being out of place in Montreal but historically connected to the city and as belonging to it collectively as an ever-growing population with specific linguistic and service-based

needs that has emerged out of an important, if all too ignored, context of north–south mobility.

When we started Nipivut, we did not know what it would become. From the beginning, it was an experiment externalising our analytic aim to generate a conversation about Inuit in the city. Quickly, however, the production of radio shows created its own context of Inuit talking to Inuit and others directly involved in Inuit affairs. The research component of the project became less about reproducing the conventional *mise-en-scène* of fieldwork than about producing new social encounters – staged but wholly improvisational (Cantarella et al. 2015). The Inuit radio team was creating its own conversations and constructing its own signifying system about a Montreal Inuit voice that people were responding to and, in turn, constructing their own meanings about. With this movement, community ownership of the research took hold and an attitudinal shift started to reconceptualise the research project in three important ways:

Attitude 1: Anthropology as an Anticipatory and Transformational Practice

As soon as Nipivut started in 2015, the radio show became a mediating apparatus for the collaborative production of knowledge – a platform for meaningful Inuit-led dialogue, developing and evolving over time. Whereas Nipivut started out as an experiment, I quickly came to see how the team was designing an intervention, changing the project's use of anthropology in the project to the crafting of a speculative, open-ended if also uncertain and unpredictable space for engagement. Research pursued in the context of action became change-oriented and 'future forming' (Gergen 2014). There was no ethnographic knowledge being discovered or collected; instead, knowledge and ethnography with it were being reconceptualised as a resource driving individual and collective action and reflection about Montreal Inuit forward. The project's commitment to action was always focused on the everyday – that is, on the production of programmes and on helping individuals learn new transferrable skills through story. The priority of the project shifted to taking a skills-based and transformational approach to ethnographic research, emphasising the capacity-building of Inuit who became involved in the project. This has made the writing of articles secondary to the social production of the radio shows, although when articles are produced they are more insightful, anthropologically speaking, and better able to articulate the tensions

and ambiguities of community life for all this (see Heron 1996).

Attitude 2: Reconceptualising the Practice of Ethnographic Enquiry in Social Terms

As a form of collective encounter, the Nipivut show quickly reworked the act of reflexivity in the project: there is no accommodation for the lone ethnographer in action anthropology. The team's production meetings became venues for myself and individual Inuit team members to reflect collectively on issues, stories and our positioning in relation to them. The idea of self-reflexivity as a professional and project-defining ethos lost its significance; reflexivity was now a social practice (Horner 2002). Fieldwork had become a social project of which I was one actor alongside others. Enabling the production team to constitute its own 'voice', reflecting together over the previous show and what was coming next, what stories to cover, who was doing what in the city and when, was about individuals taking control of their own ideas and by association taking responsibility for the project as a whole. Of course, thinking of enquiry in social terms has much in common with Indigenous critiques of research that seek to prioritise local self-determination (Tuhiwai-Smith 1999; Wilson 2008). In many ways, Nipivut has been an experiment about putting those ideas into action.

Attitude 3: Action Anthropology Privileges the Collective Use-Value of Research

What is the use value of research? At one level, we can point to the material outputs of the Nipivut project: the archive of shows and community voices, the promotion and use of Inuktitut, the training mentioned above, and the fact that the show exists as a symbol of continuity amidst flux and change in the city. But, in terms of utility, I think it is useful to borrow the idea of 'amplification' from Luke Cantarella and colleagues (2015), framing the show's utility in terms of amplifying community stories and seeing where they lead. More practically, however, the question of use-value has led the Nipivut project to think about ethnographic research in material terms – that is, privileging ideas of community work as not being about the goodness of one's character but about time, commitment and the provision of intellectual and emotional labour requiring adequate financial compensation (Horner 2002). Materialising research in this way has qualified the project's utility, instilling a value of self-determination over the direction of the project and its production of useful actions.

What the Nipivut case study demonstrates is the transformative effects of PAR on ethnographic practice. Privileging the value of Inuit self-determination in research displaces the ethnographer's role from the centre of knowledge production and instead emphasises the importance of local participation and its mobilisation to effect change. From an anthropological perspective, the aim of transforming a people's environment by their own praxis requires the people directly affected by the social situation to be centrally involved in designing, researching and carrying out the project. It is only with the people involved that an action-oriented form of research can achieve its aim of 'exploring the multiple determinants of actions, interactions and interpersonal relationships in unique contexts' (Somekh 1995: 341). Indeed, what ethnography brings to PAR in the Nipivut project is a more complex and nuanced awareness for the *context* in which action, conflict, life occurs. In fact, it is this appreciation for context that I see informing the Nipivut project's transformation of ethnographic research into a form of 'collective self-reflexive enquiry' (Kemmis and McTaggart 1988: 1). By situating Inuit social values at the heart of its design, this approach has become validation of the research itself.

Pedagogy in Action Anthropology

At this point, I want to switch tack and focus on the pedagogical implications of this shift in ethnographic practice and to consider some of the general lessons for conducting but also supervising projects employing action anthropology. I think this a necessary move to make. In general, while one finds action anthropologists eager to speak to their social and political commitment to enact PAR in order to empower marginalised individuals and mobilise their voices, exactly *how* this occurs is less clearly stated. This often leaves the idea of change to rely on some combination of the cyclical process of planning-action-reflection with conventional ideas of ethnographic enquiry – that is, open-ended interviewing techniques, participant observation, thick description, focus groups and so on; yet rarely is either the relevance of this combination questioned or its limitations for participatory practice discussed.

Also, the question of pedagogy speaks to the ambivalence around action anthropology's standing in the discipline. After all, an action-oriented mode of enquiry is not an approach the majority of anthropology students identify with as they seek to craft

their identity as scholars. Wary of the risks an action approach can pose for junior faculty in academic settings that, for better or worse, consistently value high-impact publications over engaged outcomes, and set against the backdrop of precarity that is shaping the academic profession in profound and often dispiriting and gendered ways (Berg et al. 2016; O’Keefe and Courtois 2019), most students, although maybe sympathetic to the values and principles of an action approach, rarely give action a second thought and fall back on the relative safety of the ‘cookbook’ framework of anthropological enquiry (Grant 2007: 267). Deep-seated anxieties about the invisible labour of actionist praxis (i.e. the convening of meetings, facilitation of information loops and so on) and the consequences of an audit culture within higher education continue to send disparate signals to students about what a future for action anthropologists-in-training might look like.

Now, one could argue with some justification that training students in conventional ethnographic methods should remain the focus for departments. Not only does it provide a general toolbox but it allows those who want to pursue an action approach to align with Tax’s original idea of conventional fieldwork as the primary context for action research (see Tax 1975). However, a truism of action research is that it is not something that one can just go out and do. In the majority of cases, it can take considerable time, fortitude and energy with a fair share of serendipity to prepare the groundwork for an action project. Obviously, the consideration of this open-ended timescale complicates a step-by-step approach to training, but it also underlines the emergent nature of the process and the formative character of competency within action research as it unfolds.

Joining Morten Levin and Ann Martin, I agree that one must ‘operate on the assumption that learning to be an action researcher must connect organically to the practice being learned’ (2007: 223). While in-class lectures and discussions about the history and theoretical influences of action research and the vigorous debates it has inspired (e.g. Cooke and Kothari 2001; Kesby 2007) are useful in helping build a keen knowledge base, ultimately the skills of an action anthropologist are learnt and developed through experience – that is, in doing (action) research. This approach presents a radical challenge to normalised conceptions of the professional anthropologist standing at a critical distance from the social world.

The implications of this participative standpoint for pedagogy in action anthropology are essential, for they shift attention towards the pivotal signifi-

cance of practical knowledge (*phronesis*) in research (Eikeland 2006). In short, pedagogy in action moves the researcher into enquiry as a form of praxis that takes ‘reality’ as never fixed but open to possibilities. As Bengt Molander sums up so well: ‘Understanding and change build partly upon representations of reality, but such representations are not pictures of reality independent of action but parts of the process of changing reality through action’ (1992: 21). It becomes clear that the ‘problem situation’ at hand, as Tax (1975) termed it, cannot be simply objectified or disembedded from its social or historical contexts. On the contrary, it suggests a complex condition or social field for the formation of knowing that derives from local perspectives and individual experiences.

Training-in-Character: An Aspirational Approach to (Supervisory) Practice

Clearly, quality in action training is not reducible to a checklist of accomplishments. As Judi Marshall and Peter Reason (2007) posit, quality in action research hinges on being present, which is an attentive, if provisional, awareness of the situation at hand derived from tacit and embodied understanding. As a character trait, presence is not an instrumental or technical skill that can be easily taught, if at all. For these reasons, I do not think it beneficial to provide methodological rules on what to do. Rather, in taking Marshall and Reason’s (2007) lead and building on examples from the Nipivut project, I choose to concern myself with ‘training-in-character’ and below provide four provisional pathways to help guide ethnographers be-in-action and support supervisors in their work with students engaging in action projects.

(1) *Animate the future-forming potential of research: privilege the attainment of new skills, transformation of understandings, changing of practices*

The shifts in ethnographic practice within the Nipivut project reflect how action refocuses attention away from outcomes and onto the processes inherent in unfolding change. The individual development of different technical and social skills, the production of culturally relevant content for each episode, and the brokering of a dialogical space to discuss issues of importance to Inuit in the city all speak to the formation of the future – at the personal and collective level.

The influence of PAR in what I am calling action anthropology emphasises the aim to transform people’s skills or people’s understandings or practices which contribute deeper insights into the social milieu in which change is sought. This primary focus

on unfolding change does not undermine the value of scholarly analysis, but it does rework its emphasis. The philosopher John Heron (1996) refers to this as the 'action paradox': whereas action enhances the quality of propositional knowledge, the reverse does not function in the same way – that is, *knowing that* cannot fully describe or account for practical knowledge (*knowing how*). It is more productive to think of action anthropology as a means towards *knowing how*. Although this orders propositional outputs to be secondary, the experiential insights that one gains in attempting to enact change in participation with others actually enhances the quality of propositional content more so 'than is the case when propositional outcomes are primary' (Heron 1996: 48). This understanding asserts a radical challenge to conventional models of scholarship for (student) researchers. It states that the stand-alone peer-reviewed research article or thesis may not be an adequate enough outcome or expectation of the research process. It also draws attention to the questioning of evaluation criteria and the process through which 'success' or positive effects are to be measured and/or understood by all stakeholders.

(2) *Commit to knowing as a participative process and to the co-management of a 'communicative space'; remain responsive to boundary-making*

The reconceptualisation of ethnographic enquiry in social terms is perhaps the most radical task facing the action anthropologist. For the Nipivut project, the formation of a communicative space has been an essential component of the radio production. Moving the research design into a form of 'collective self-reflexive enquiry' (Kemmis and McTaggart 1988: 1) has animated the value of self-determination and realised community ownership of the project.

In an action approach, when we reject the model of the self-focused reflexive ethnographer, we can reconstitute ethnography as a socially reflexive practice that privileges dialogue with co-researchers as the foundation of all aspects of the research, including the development and implementation of its ethical protocols (Horner 2002). To encourage researchers to navigate this shift, it is useful to consider Habermas' theory of communicative action for crafting communicative spaces within projects (Kemmis 2001). Based on the idea of communication as a principal media of social relation through which people foster mutual understanding and 'co-operative interpretation of their experiences' (Bevan 2013: 14), a communicative space is 'constituted as issues or problems are opened up for discussion, and when participants ex-

perience their interaction as fostering the democratic expression of diverse views' (Kemmis 2001: 100). However, the reality of crafting and maintaining a communicative space is rarely ever a straightforward undertaking. Far from the idealistic vision of a 'democratic expression of diverse views', its veracity can often be tested by strategies of silence, or non-participation or the over-representation of individual community voices.

For a singular project with benchmarked goals, specific attention to communication may be perceived by the researcher as an obstacle to the achievement of a collective aim. Yet it is vital for researchers to embody in practice the idea of knowledge as an open, contested and emergent process subject to ongoing change, correction and elaboration, rather than as a fixed exclusive binary of right or wrong information. The task of the researcher, then, is to embrace such contingency. In terms of keeping the social conversation around research going, it is useful to recognise that, while socially reflexive dialogue may emphasise the difficulties of coming to agreed-upon action, even the act of conversing and exchanging points of view is itself a set of changing circumstances which requires close ethnographic attention, especially to the establishment of boundaries by individuals or groups within and around the decision-making process.

(3) *Engage with what is positive as well as the contradictions, criticism and uncertainty; actively work through relations of power and their effects*

In the spirit of equanimity, action work can be exhilarating, and positive feedback should be embraced, but only to the extent that one pays equal attention to the challenges which, like the praise, will inevitably rise and fall before re-appearing again. Like all action projects, the Nipivut project has faced its fair share of challenges from the frequent turnover of personnel, to unforeseen production delays and the working out of differences of opinion. It has only been in the last two years or so of the project after the switch to a grant focused on the development of partnerships with urban Inuit organisations that we have been able to design a system to address these issues at a collective level. Another challenge of action anthropology is the giving up of control over the research and decision-making process. Respecting the right of a community to make its own decisions and make mistakes in the process (Stapp 2012; see also Tax 1975), a key tenet of Tax's action anthropological thought, requires that the researcher internalise (over time) an attitude of equanimity to the distribution

of control across an extended network of project-focused but nevertheless disparate relations. Disentangling control over the direction of the project from traditional ideas of competent research practice in this way can deeply affect the confidence of even the most experienced researcher. Yet this is an important step, not only personally in challenging the 'narcissistic conformity' of higher educational structures (James and Gordon 2006: 368), but also in realising the aims of transformative change and the collective use-value of research within participatory enquiry.

In committing to a process of co-constituted decision-making in an action project, one is not relinquishing control over directions or methods. Rather, from my learning on the Nipivut project, I would state the situation differently and assert that by making collaboration a precondition of one's engagement re-affirms to colleagues the commitment to working towards non-hierarchical roles within project design. This is important, as it emphasises that co-researchers are 'historical protagonists' (Fals-Borda 1979: 43) whose experience, agency and reflections on their own situation are central to the overall aims to implement practical actions.

Furthermore, however sustainable a project might appear, the researcher must become attuned to their own capacity to cope with and think/live through the uncertainty, ambiguity and contradictions – what Kim Fortun (2001: 13) terms the 'double binds' of research – which can underpin this kind of open-ended engagement. Coping with uncertainty must arise out of a fulfilling engagement with the work; otherwise, the ability of the researcher to grow and flourish within the context of the project will be limited and will probably compromise the project's longevity.

(4) *Embrace and come to terms with research as an unfinished process*

Turning attention to the processes of unfolding change means that an action project is never finished. As one aspect of the project may reach fruition, the consequences of it for interpersonal relations, decision-making processes or collective motivation unfold and affect, shape and define as well as foreclose and delimit emerging endeavours. The Nipivut project itself was the unintended consequence of an earlier social history initiative that I had been involved in with Inuit co-researchers. The turn of attention from that research project towards establishing the radio show closed down other avenues of research, and, while some relationships receded, new ones were formed as the team identified new priorities. As with any project, relations of power also shift and

change; some stakeholders may become more assertive or emboldened whereas others may recede from view. The anthropologist-in-action is to become an anthropologist-of-action tasked with conceptualising the shifts in people's perspectives and examining the processes and relations of power at play (Cornwall and Fleming 1995). This is no easy matter, especially when one is also an actor in the same ethno-drama. Indeed, in general, I find it difficult even today to respond to questions about my own engagements with the Nipivut project in a straightforward manner. Thus, for the sake of a report, I could speak of being a principal investigator, project manager, executive producer, co-researcher or some other affiliate, but in reality my participation has always been shaped and influenced by the shifting contours of how the broader collective and, at times, particular individuals within it have sought to establish, contest or remake project structures; identifying or revisiting priorities along the way and thereby transforming the team's as well as my own expectations of what I/we should be doing.

Conclusion

Against the backdrop of scrutinous reviews of academic performance and the institutional demands put on scholars to demonstrate the public impacts of their research, I think it is reasonable to assume that the current uptake of PAR within anthropological projects will continue – hence the value in repurposing the language of action anthropology to better facilitate discussion about this approach. And yet, in spite of this trend and the turn away from anthropology as a solo endeavour, one questions how anthropology departments are adapting their methods classes. The fact that most classes typically remain classroom-based and designed around individualised projects (Jessee et al. 2015) has much to say about the continuing failure of collaborative approaches to displace the central tropes of rapport, immersion and ethnographic authority as professional ideals (Marcus 1997). Perhaps because of the assumption that participatory research is something that 'scholars can do later in their careers' (Jessee et al. 2015: 9), one finds its implications for anthropological training rarely extending beyond the application of conventional methods to a new set of circumstances.

The utility of PAR rests to a large degree on context, feasibility and desirability and a commitment to the agency of local actors and their right to exercise self-determination in all aspects of a project (Stewart

and Martinez-Lucio 2017); this would include the right of individuals and community groups to make mistakes (Tax 1975). Unless these conditions are met, the purpose of PAR can become little more than a symbolic or empty gesture (Stewart and Martinez-Lucio 2017). In this characterisation of PAR, one sees the challenges that it can present for anthropological research.

If there is one overarching lesson I can draw from my experience as co-lead of the Nipivut project, it is that in the day-to-day realities of research the ethnographer's capacity for competent practice relies fundamentally on the habituation of a good and ethical disposition for acting/feeling in certain ways and situations (i.e. *habitus*). This is why I think of 'presence' as a suitable organising principle for pedagogy in action anthropology. Its value lies in substituting ideas of knowledge as something one possesses with knowing as an open-ended process, as an internal good of action anthropology that can thrive, grow and be cultivated through embodied practice. This is where supervision can play a crucial role in helping anthropologists-in-training see themselves not just as (student) researchers but as collaborative action leaders (see Wood and Louw 2018). That said, a keen balance must be struck. As Olav Eikeland (2006) points out, for action research to achieve its potential, its practitioners must remain vigilant and not reinforce the position of its numerous critics by reducing praxis to unprincipled participation. On the contrary, researchers must transcend the current divisions of academic labour and non-epistemic collaboration. 'If action research is going to be more than just "applied research,"' Eikeland advises, 'it has to concern itself with and transform the formative learning processes and the research work directed towards principles, ends, and definitions too' (2006: 44).

Thus, we return to Tax's central tenet that the recasting of the knowledge production process as a co-constituted practice aimed at addressing community-identified problems can provide an important platform for ethnographic learning. However, it is clear that if action anthropology is to gain traction amongst researchers it will rely, to a large degree, not only on an attitudinal shift in ethnographic practice but also on what pedagogical decisions we take as lecturers, programme directors, and supervisors.

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Notes

1. The institutional partners are the Southern Quebec Inuit Association/Inuit Siqirnirmiut Quebecmi Il-lauyit located in Montreal and Tungasuvvingat Inuit located in Ottawa.
2. This research has been funded by two grants from the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council: an Insight Grant (2013–2019), 'Out of Place in Nunaliijuaq: Effecting Social Change through Participatory Action Research with Montreal Inuit' [435-2013-1794], and a Partnership Development Grant (2018–2021): 'Mobilizing Nipivut: A Radio-based Communications Platform for Urban Inuit Community Development' [890-2017-0033].
3. Nipivut show archives can be accessed as a podcast at <http://soundcloud.com/nipivut>.
4. This was the so-called 'Fox Project' that ran between 1948 and 1962 (see Daubenmier 2008).
5. It has been suggested that Tax's vision for action anthropology never achieved a 'mature expression' within the broader discipline because of the lack of adequate training opportunities for departmental students at the University of Chicago and Tax's inability over time to foster a haven for students and faculty to exchange ideas and critique practice (Rubinstein 1986: 275; cf. Cobb 2019).
6. In recent years, a new generation of anthropologists have returned to Tax's work to shed new light on his role in helping to shape a counter-tradition to disciplinary practice (see Cobb 2019; and Smith 2015). This has prompted the exploration of a more

complex and nuanced history of anthropological engagements with Indigenous peoples. It has also highlighted the linkages between Tax's approach and contemporary debates concerning the decolonisation of academic structures and methodological practice.

7. Tax's model of action anthropology was oriented around the anthropologist as a central agent of change in both initiating and sustaining the project which questions the real extent of local self-determination. Also, Tax was keen to emphasise the theoretical value of his action project that may well prioritise academic discourse and the resultant publications over practical engagements. Furthermore, a broad criticism of Tax's model is its Eurocentrism and promotion of distinctly American-style values of 'freedom,' 'self-determination' and 'truth'.
8. Northern radio has history in Montreal dating back to at least the 1970s, when the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) produced and broadcast radio programmes on shortwave in Inuktitut, such as Elijah Menarik's popular Isumavut programme, as part of its so-called 'Northern Service'. However, while those CBC radio transmissions were produced in the south, in Montreal, they could only be heard on shortwave in Nunavik, northern Quebec. In contrast to that original 'Northern Service' then, back in 2015, Nipivut was the first Inuit radio show broadcast from Montreal to Montreal.
9. There are 14 Inuit communities north of the 55th Parallel in Quebec that have legal status as northern villages under the Quebec government's *Act Respecting Northern villages and the Kativik Regional Government* legislation. Describing Montreal as an Inuit community therefore does not hold any legal standing, although the Southern Quebec Inuit Association represents all Inuit resident in southern Quebec.

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