**Conversations in Social Justice:**



**Democratic Methodologies: Disrupting Research**

**Podcast transcript**

Series 1. Episode 5.

*Dr Charlotte Haines Lyon, lecturer at York St John University talks to Dr Debbie Ralls of University of Manchester and Professor Kaz Stuart of University of Cumbria.  Their conversation explores how democratic methodologies contribute to social justice and the variety of conundrums they pose. They discuss how democratic methodologies can disrupt power, research and also the academy.*

**Charlotte Haines Lyon**

Hello, and welcome to this conversation social justice for the Institute for Social Justice at York St John University. This particular conversation will be about the use of democratic methodologies in research and how we see them as part of our social justice work. I'm Charlotte Haines Lyon, lecturer in children, young people and families at York St John, and my research has covered democratic parent engagement in schools, education under COVID, and currently I'm exploring toilet policies in schools. To help explore democratic methodologies, I have two excellent guests, Debbie Rawls from Manchester University and Kaz Stuart from Cumbria University. Welcome both of you.

Could you start by introducing yourself, please If we start with Debbie.

**Debbie Rawls**

Hi, I'm Debbie Rawls and I'm a Leverhulme early career research fellow at the University of Manchester. Prior to coming into academia, I was a lecturer in further education for about 20 years. So I'm relatively new to academia, but my research is looking at how we can redefine education for more inclusive urban places. So, how approaches to education policy practice, things like pedagogy, curriculum, governance, can contribute to making fairer and more equitable places to live and really trying to foreground the experiences and opinions and expertise of children and young people in those, in that research.

**Kaz Stuart**

Hi, my name's Kaz Stuart. I'm director of the Centre for Research in Health and Society at the University of Cumbria. My work predominantly has been researching issues that face young people, particularly things that challenge their well-being, and, which mean they experience unequal outcomes. That comes from having been a primary secondary school teacher, social care worker, outdoor instructor, and all sorts of other things directly working with young people. All that has now led me to having a real passion for inequality. I'm trying to get people to stop focusing on the symptoms of inequality and to work further upstream, tackling the causes of inequality, which are now really well documented and understood. But getting people to take action on them is a different story.

**Charlotte Haines Lyon**

I think I should just add that my background is youth and community work, I think my passion, again, inequality, and specifically around inequality of voice and whose voice counts and how voices are used, which leads directly into my interest in democratic methodologies. So hopefully, we'll be able to discuss the idea of what we mean by democratic methodologies and how we see that it links to social justice and spend time unpicking, sort of the ethical conundrums that we, sort of, find along the way as we go through our research journey. So, I guess the place to start would be, what do we understand by democratic methodologies and how it links to social justice?

**Kaz Stuart**

I think it's multifaceted. So for me, there's something about what topics get explored, or what questions we might have, I think where those questions are generated is a democratic challenge. We want all people to be able to generate questions around the issues that trouble them or face them. I think there's something around how we answer those questions or how we explore those questions, and try to ensure that we have ways of doing research which is democratic as well. Then there's who gets to participate, that’s a democratic choice, and what changes are made to make the world a more democratic place. So I think there's issues of methodology, of participation, of knowledge democracy, and social change. So I think it's a complex and fascinating subject.

**Charlotte Haines Lyon**

I think that's really succinctly put, I'm wondering if you might just give some examples of maybe where it doesn't happen or where it does happen?

**Kaz Stuart**

Well, I guess one of my attempts at working democratically was working with about 800 young people in one local authority, exploring their experiences of violence and gang involvement. And it felt democratic in that young people were being asked to give their views on the issues of violence in the area. And the council was interested in shaping policy around young people's perspectives; that felt very democratic. But unfortunately, what happened was that the council didn't like the answers that the young people gave and the views that were expressed. And so that piece of work got shelved so that was actually probably more harmful to the young people than not doing the research at all that started as a piece of democratic research, which ended up entirely oppressive. So, you know, just one example of how troublesome it can be.

**Debbie Rawls**

A point Kaz raises is one that unfortunately happens again and again, in terms of that sort of pipeline from who commissions the research, and who conducts it and then like Kaz said, if people don’t like what said, then somehow that research gets shelved. And it can lead to a lot of disillusionment from the young people who were being told that their opinions counted. And I think it's really for me about what do we mean by democracy. And I think that causes an awful lot of problems. When you're working with policymakers, for example, and some local authorities and other charities and businesses. I think, you know, in recent years, when I was looking at democracy, and what I understood by democracy, for my research, there's been a real move to democracy as sort of an individual's right to own something, or to have their say, rather than a collective endeavour. So, the whole sort of discourse around things like free schools was being held up as parents democratic right, to demand the best education for their children, for their child, their individual child, rather than thinking, all of us in society want the best for every child. I think there's that sort of trying to agree on and communicate what we mean by democratic methodology and on what the results that a democratic methodology should have. So I think that the theories that inform your thinking are really important and the way we try and communicate that to our participants and our research partners. To me, I found the work of Mark Warren works with on parental engagement in the States really helpful in trying to think about what I saw as a democratic methodology. Because he identifies sort of three key points, when you're talking about engagement, that are relational engagement.

So for me, democratic methodology has to have a relational element to it. And he talks about how any sort of relational engagement, and for me, that is, the core of any democratic methodology, in my opinion, has to have in it relationship-building among a particular group. So in the example Kaz gave among those young people, and also between different groups, so whether it's between, you know, the local authority and the young people, or the researcher and the institution, you know. The second thing that he talks about is, there should be an explicit aim to build leadership skills. That really rang home when Kaz was talking about her example, because those young people were actually left powerless. You know, they were impotent. They had had so much positive experience, it sounded like engaging in the actual research, but then it was just dropped, and they were just left adrift. So they should be, you know, and everybody needs to understand that, engaged in the research. So whoever's commissioning, it needs to be agreed that there should be some sort of attempt to build leadership for those who don't normally have those opportunities. And then finally, the aim should be around trying to disrupt the current sort of power dynamics, and redistribute power. So for me, in terms of democratic research and democratic methodologies, that's what I'm trying to do. It's difficult, as Kaz said, it's challenging. And I think that one of the main issues is making sure that everybody understands that that's the aim.

**Kaz Stuart**

I was really interested in what you're saying, that'd be about the kind of individual versus collective. And I guess that resonates to some extent with those dynamics of power. Because if all individuals have a right to a voice, or to influence, that some people have more power than others, and it means that some of those voices are going to be more privileged than other voices. The collectivity, for me, is really important, and making sure that knowledge generation and the findings and research are useful and support all people. But I don't think that we should support all people equally. So I think for me, in democratic research, the principle of equity is really important, that we enable people who wouldn't normally be able to contribute, to contribute to knowledge generation, that we enable the issues that face more - challenge people in society, to come to the front and to be considered by all people. And that the findings from research, the voices of these groups who wouldn't normally get to express their views are privileged in some way, where they were previously marginalized. I think the concept of social justice has this kind of commitment to equity. I feel as if we often think of democracy as treating people equally, giving all people a voice, giving all people a vote, and treating all people the same. I think it's interesting to explore equity in the lens of democracy as well.

**Charlotte Haines Lyon**

One of the things you were saying there is, you know, the explicit link with social justice, is it's not just about ensuring everybody participates in the same way or everybody has a voice, but it's actually, there is quite a strong thing around disrupting power dynamics, and sort of challenging the status quo. It's much more complex than just getting everybody to give their opinion, which is how often I think we might see it.

**Debbie Rawls**

It's trying to get across that equity rather than equality of getting down to those key definitions. As Kaz said it can be very, very challenging, particularly in the academic context of whose opinions and voices are valued. You can be sort of challenged for excluding more traditionally - voices that are traditionally considered experts, if you like.

**Charlotte Haines Lyon**

I think brings us nicely on to the sort of how we actually do the research and the issues that face us in the academy as it were, as we go along. Thank you both for that. So starting with the different steps of the research journey, so starting with that, thinking around the design of research projects, what kind of things do we need to take into account? And what issues have you been faced with, as you kind of, I suppose, start designing your project.

**Kaz Stuart**

I think the time that you need and the relationships that you need to enable people to fully design research with you, if we're really going to work in a participatory way, then our participants design the research projects alongside us or with us. But that requires a huge investment of time to develop trust and rapport, and to enable participants who might not previously have done any research whatsoever to have enough skills and knowledge to be able to make decisions with you. And getting that costed into projects, I think is really challenging. Sometimes funders get the need for that to happen and principal of co-design and participatory research is understood, but investment in it isn't as forthcoming. I think that can be a challenge.

**Debbie Rawls**

Yeah, definitely. I think that there can be a reluctance sometimes in terms of things like safeguarding and ethics, as Kaz was saying before try and redress those issues of equity, and as I said before, foreground the voices and experiences opinions of those who are normally marginalised or not considered in academia. Just to give an example, things like, if you were working in a gallery, it's very easy or relatively easy to put on an exhibition produced by children, young people just through using the school's own safeguarding policies. But trying to do that, when you are calling it research, is very, very difficult. There are completely different sorts of rules, I would say that the exhibition that I'm referring to is one that was at the Whitworth Gallery in Manchester, which is called *Now We Are 11*. And it was a fantastic exhibition curated by six children in an inner-city school that gave real insight into their lives. But if I were to try and do that, as a piece of research, I would come up against all sorts of barriers, things like having the children's photographs alongside the exhibition, having their first names alongside the exhibition. And like I say, for me, that was a fantastic piece of research. But because it wasn't badged as research, it was able to go ahead.

I think there are, at the moment, there are lots and lots of barriers to creative, more democratic methodologies that we have to sort of try and jump through that actually can prevent the people that we want to that like, Kaz was saying, the voices that we want to push forward. So for example, the research that I'm doing is speaking to children, young people about their experience of being taught in particular ways; ways that a school or a Local Education Authority are saying - for example, they're using particular teaching methods that they say, trying to encourage social action, different ways of looking at social justice, happiness, curriculum, things like that. But what happens when these sorts of innovations are, when normally we look at them, they're looked at by professionals, rather than children and people themselves. So I'm speaking to the children and people about their experiences of learning in this way, and also what happens to them outside that classroom when they move on and they've learned these skills, they've learned about social justice and social action projects, they want to take it further, but then perhaps is nothing that they can go on to do. So one of the things was after the focus groups is the children, young people putting on an exhibition or event themselves, in a home city to say what they'd like to happen next, as a result, and the positive things that they think have come out of learning in this way. But there's an awful lot of challenges. So for example, in Berlin, I'm not allowed to use the young people's names at all. So I have to just use a number. So in terms of that young person saying what she or he feels about their city, the school, the way that they've learned, they're just going to be a number. The teachers can be named, and obviously I can be named, but the child has to be a number. In New York City, it's very, very difficult to even get into the classroom. Lots of challenges there. So very difficult and when I went through ethics, it was really hard to convince the committee that I needed photographs or first names of children and young people. But for me that would go back to what we were talking about would be me as an academic, my photograph, interpreting these nameless, faceless children's views. And yet, if I were to be doing this as the Whitworth gallery, I'd be able to use their faces in it because I'd just be able to use the school safeguarding policies. So it's really, really frustrating because I want to have the children and people speaking for themselves but then if they're speaking just as a number or as a faceless person. I accept all the safeguarding. No, that's absolutely right.

**Charlotte Haines Lyon**

So is it a hangover from thinking that research is very sort of pure and sort of you adding certain numbers from things rather than actually, participants are co-creating the knowledge and part of that research? And it's we haven't quite caught up in sort of our ethics and procedures, recognising that actually, all the people we're working with are co-creators. And actually, we might want to involve them. And it's just a really different way of thinking about things, isn't it? I just wonder if we haven't quite caught up with that yet.

**Kaz Stuart**

Yeah, I think we – the protection from harm paradigm positions our participants as these vulnerable beings that we must protect and conceal and hide away. Whereas in participatory research, they're more valuable memories with research teams, and perhaps we are and so they should be celebrated and privileged and profiled, yet this is completely different discourse on participants.

**Charlotte Haines Lyon**

And that's really interesting, isn't it? Actually, because Kate Brown, I think, talks about the vulnerability zeitgeist, and how sort of this idea of people being vulnerable really, actually stops them with kind of preventing them engaging fully in society, and we use it to kind of sideline people and marginalise people. So that sort of fits in with that.

**Debbie Rawls**

The schools that I'm working with, the teachers that I'm working with, are very keen for the students who haven't got any particular safeguarding needs, that they do have their first names, and they can have their photographs, you know, the teachers are very, very keen for that. One of the teachers used a brilliant phrase, but you know, I'm not, I'm not empowering my students, my students are, are already, they already have power, but they're not given it. He doesn't like that phrase empower, because it implies that they haven't got any power. But it's more, we're preventing it in traditional approaches to research.

**Kaz Stuart**

Lag in thinking or reliance on kind of outdated research thinking also happens when we look at the kind of ways in which we plan to collect data, there's so many data collection tools. I think all data collection tools are equally valid but for some types of research, like democratic research, I use creative tools to be able to engage groups of people in a creative process, who might not be willing or able to verbally communicate face to face, or fill in survey forms for whatever reason. So one piece of work that I did was with young victims of crime, and it would have been really triggering for a young victim of crime to be presented with a form, or to sit down with an audio recorder in front of them, it would trigger all sorts of memories. So to explore their experiences of before the incident, during the incident, and afterwards, we did the load of drawings. The drawings really powerfully communicated the change in life experience and the emotive experience of being a young victim of crime. It was celebrated and applauded by the commissioners, who totally got it, the piece of work, which is fantastic, but publication was impossible. I didn't have a numeric data set, I didn't have a validated tool, I didn't have any metrics. And so it didn't gain its voice as a piece of research in the wider field of sociology or social care. So that's another way in which although qualitative methodologies are accepted, they're not as accepted still, as more quantitative measures -

**Charlotte Haines Lyon**

Which actually brings in a whole other layer of democratic issues in terms of if you can't publish what you're doing, getting out there, and which kind of publishing is counted, which kind of publishing can we - is accessible, etc. It brings a whole new layer of issues in which is interesting in itself. In terms of methodologies. It's quite interesting, isn't it? I mean, I've run into issues myself, because I was supposed to keep everything really harmonious when I was working with parents in school. And actually, that was quite problematic, because if parents couldn't express their upset at certain things, it was holding them back. And it was actually stopping some of the democratic work we were doing. But it seemed to be unethical to encourage any dissent, if you like. And that led to sort of various workarounds, to essential thinking. But it's unpicking all those different ways of thinking, isn't it as you start framing that research, and then the design but also issues that will continue? I mean, in terms of recruiting participants, how have you found that, and what issues have you had there?

**Debbie Rawls**

Like I say my research is with children, young people at school, it's sort of aged eight, nine plus. And here in the UK, I'd say that the recruitment was pretty straightforward. But in New York in particular, it's been very, very tricky. Because they're they have a whole, teachers aren't allowed to do research on students in our own school. So the whole concept of action research as we have it over here is very difficult. I'd spent a lot of time building relationships with these schools and teachers, prior to actually contacting, going through the process of recruiting students, so it was really, really important. And the fact that I'm not just taking from them. So, for example, with the teacher that I'm working with in New York, we're working collaboratively on some publications, he really wants to publish about the work that he's doing on the social action, maker spaces. So we've been working together on that. And then with other colleagues in Barcelona, and in Rio de Janeiro, again, they want to get the work that they're doing out there. So we've got a conference symposium and things like that. So it's not just the method itself, it's all around that relationship, to me the relationship that I have with my participants and the collaborators, that I’m not just extracting from them. So the work that I did in the UK, with the students from a Cooperative school council, you know, they presented at an education conference. So we submitted a proposal for conference. And I have to say, it's very interesting, because it was a Cooperative education conference, and that conference welcomed them with open arms, and they were treated like big celebrities, everybody thought it was fantastic. But I'd be very, very interested to see if it that same proposal would have been accepted at one of the big, traditional education conferences, because they were the presenters of the symposium. I mean, I was named, but they were the main people. So sadly, I don't know whether that would be accepted at a traditional conference.

**Kaz Stuart**

You know, there's this really awful term like hard-to-reach participants or hard-to-reach people. Well, you know, they're not really, we know where they are. It's not that they're hard-to-reach, it's that we find it hard to reach them. Yeah, we kind of need to flip that sentiment, it's not their issue, it is our issue. The traditional type of research recruitment, you know, putting an advert out, or a poster or something like that to young people who potentially have been gang involved, is absolutely not going to work. So we spent a month in the benefit office and the food bank, just hanging out and being around and having informal conversations with young people as they came and went. Eventually the young people got curious as to why we were still there, what we were doing, and then that led to us having more extensive conversations with them, and then being able to work with them. We had to hold our nerve, that after a month of hanging out in these places, drinking too much coffee, that young people would want to finally talk to us and that that would be a fruitful way of recruitment. And of course, again, it's that time and time equals money. So it's that challenge, again, to funders of research, to invest in researchers being able to really meaningfully go to the populations who really do have the answers to the questions that we're interested in answering.

**Charlotte Haines Lyon**

It's really difficult one isn't it to sell it to funders or whoever's paying you, I'm just gonna go and hang out somewhere. I had that issue.

**Kaz Stuart**

In research design terms, to kind of go you know, we'll design it we'll put the ethics application and we'll put the advert out we'll start. We almost need another phase of research adding in, which is like research trust building, whether you know the participants or you're new to them, just, I think that's often missed.

**Debbie Rawls**

And I think just because particularly for the groups Kaz is talking about, there are huge issues of trust. You know, I worked for a few years in a multi-site centre and in one of the more socioeconomically disadvantaged areas of Manchester, and we ran an alternative education programme. And this was before I went into academia, and we were overrun with people popping up to do research with a sort of 20 pound Amazon voucher or whatever it was then. None of the young people were interested at all, they'd had this happen so many times with people come in and like I say, it was just a one-way thing. They were extracting information, going away publishing something. There was no relationship building. The young people didn't get anything out of it. Apart from the voucher. They weren't bothered about the voucher because that person didn't care about them. And these were young people, remember, who were long term non-attenders at school for lots of different reasons. They were already vulnerable. Lots of them were in the care system. It was really irritating the amount of people who would rock up from the university, offering vouchers and expecting young people to jump at the opportunity to be engaged in research, which has no meaning for those young people

**Charlotte Haines Lyon**

It’s so key isn’t it this whole trust relational - bit, it’s so much missed out of sort of recruitment, and is often almost seen as slightly suspicious, because we're supposed to be so neutral to go down the traditional route. I mean, if we're looking at data, how do our understandings of data, how are they affected by our commitment to democratic methodologies and social justice as phases that one of the questions, so I think that's a contentious issue in itself.

**Kaz Stuart**

I think what's valued is a really contentious topic. So I did some work with a colleague in Australia. And we've spent a lot of time working with, doing research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth who mostly predominantly populate the alternative school system in Australia, and traditionally have experienced poorer outcomes and other young people. The approach to generating data has to be entirely different, it has to be absolutely culturally sensitive. The way in which those people generate knowledge is do like yarning. You know, they sit around in storytelling circles, and they share life experiences, and they tell metaphorical stories, that's how they generate - encode meaning and pass it on to the next generation. And so the research, for me to be democratic has to be a cultural fit, there will be lots of storytelling, lots of sitting around in circles and sharing knowledge. And you're never quite sure what was a real-life experience or a friend of mine once, or something kind of more mythical, but to some extent, that didn't matter, because it was still the meaning making. But again, whether that is considered robust, valid, to use positivistic words, data is questionable. I would throw those words out and say that, you know, as long as it is being meaningful, there's empathetic validity. People empathise with it, if it resonates with them. And as long as it builds a case for understanding a phenomenon better, then it's a good piece of research. But I still think that qualitative research is often judged by positivistic standards.

**Debbie Rawls**

You know, again, I use similar creative methods, so lots of drawing, writing sort of thoughts, photovoice participatory mapping. So basically, you know, using maps, but the map is a sort of creative space, rather than the map is looking at where the sports centre is and where the library is, which is interesting, because that's what the adult professionals tend to do. But you know, when you look at assets, with young people, they will talk about people a lot of times, so they'll talk about their grandfather, who's a brilliant drummer, and a really kind person. And so you get a completely different map. But again, it's about what's considered valid and what's considered rigorous by the Academy. And I think that's where the whole REF thing comes in, you know, and how publications are judged while they're graded. And I think in terms of democratic methodologies, and the future of democratic methodologies, it'd be really interesting to hear Kaz’s views, but also thinking about the York St John, current position with social justice, because I think that things need to change. from the top down, it's thinking about who has power. We talked about dynamics of power before, but who has power within the academy? You know, so Kaz is a professor and so I think that in terms of getting to a position of power within an institution. There needs to be a better way of sharing amongst, and that's where your sort of democratic methodologies comes in Charlotte, sharing from those who have been successful in inverted commas within the Academy. For those starting out or earlier on in their careers wanting to use these democratic methods, you know, how do we increase the amount of people who have a say, within the academy, who are using democratic methodologies, so we can challenge the issues that Kaz and yourself were talking about before in terms of these methodologies not being valued? Where are they, the people that we've talked about, I want those people who I'm working with to be in the academy in the university teaching us? Why haven't we got people coming in and talking to academics about the realities and their expertise and their ideas? Why doesn't that happen? Why haven't we got all these different people who were forced out into the margins in the academy sharing, because they're not valued, but if we had more people higher up if you like, like Kaz, could that happen? And that's why I'm really interested in what, I don't know whether you can say a little bit Charlotte about what's happening at York St John, and whether you think that that has some potential to shift things.

**Charlotte Haines Lyon**

I'm hoping the Institute for Social Justice is creating that space where we're not necessarily so driven by the REF. For those people who aren't wedded to, in academia, the REF is a particular thing that is valuing, I think it's fair to say, particular journal articles that are measured in a particular way that doesn't necessarily fit more community-based work, for example. So I think, at least there is some space there, where other things might drive it, although I think, you know, getting funding is also another issue. But it is nice to have that space where the social justice projects are driven by things that are going on in particular areas. So one of the projects I'm involved in at the moment, is with York City Council, looking at how we deal with COVID and work with families. And we're not driven by having to produce a top quality article from a top quality journal. It's what's the legacy for your work, and that's really exciting to be involved in. So it is nice having that space, it'll be interesting to see how that works, as time goes on. Kaz I'd be really interested know how you've managed to sort of hold all these different sort of things together.

**Kaz Stuart**

We've been fairly successful in having a commitment to, interesting seems more palatable to our university to talk about alleviating inequality, than to having a commitment to social justice. Social justice was considered a little bit left field, but we have got a commitment to tackling inequality, which has been really helpful. So that kind of helps align people's research interests and gives people permission to work in that space. And then I guess having you know, some influence in the university, we've always been a university that does applied research. And we constantly deal with the Oh, you're the applied rather than the clinical people, which we’re very happy with. We’ve always had a reputation for doing applied research, but now we do more training for staff and for students around participatory methodologies. And that's definitely creating a bit of a tension in terms of people's methodology. And we just have to tackle these issues up front of you may not get published, you know, in a leading peer reviewed journal or get a position at the highly esteemed conference. But there are these other places where you can influence you know, there are plenty places where we can still publish, there are ways in which we can influence systems, that kind of working within and without, I think, finding the journals within the academy that will publish, finding the conferences that are comfortable home, and then also trying to exert influence where you can on the systems that won’t play ball, and also finding alternatives. You know, I want this work to have impact. I think social change is part of the democratic process. And I might not achieve that by publishing in the peer review journal, I might better achieve that by doing blogs, or Wikis or podcasts like this, or publishing in professional magazines and things like that, or writing to politicians. I think there's an interesting dynamic for democratic researchers to consider what the best publication route is, for a whole different range of reasons.

**Charlotte Haines Lyon**

I think that's a really good way for thinking about impact in a much more sort of real sort of grounded way. One of the exciting things in the last years, there's been a real emphasis on the small funding grants at York St John, it has been to be multidisciplinary. So the grants that I've been awarded is linked with psychology, for example, and actually discovered that there's some really exciting things going on in psychology with quantitative research in really democratic ways and actually working with colleagues too. I mean, the Toilet Talk project that I'm involved in, so I'm learning things and they're learning and sort of discovering it, the exciting stuff isn't all just in one area. But actually, there's lots of things and those links start shaking things up a bit. A really good development, I found –

**Kaz Stuart**

Yeah, because our participants, if they're designing the research projects, at any turn, can say, no, we want to do a survey.

**Charlotte Haines Lyon**

And as my psychology colleagues say, you know, what they can do is that if the community needs to find out some information, they can say, well, we can help you find the measurement tool that you need, if that's what you need. So it's not that all measurement tools are bad or all methods, but it's finding out why we're doing stuff and what we're doing. So I found that really, really exciting over the last year to be involved with those projects, and different people

**Kaz Stuart**

I remember Michelle Fine at a conference saying, she's a researcher from the Central University of New York, she's very committed to participatory methods. And I remember her saying that she's philosophically monogamous to participation in social justice, that she's methodologically promiscuous, so she'll use any method which is appropriate for the question or the exploration or the community.

**Debbie Rawls**

I agree, Charlotte, I work with quite a lot of human geographers and they are doing some brilliant work, and maybe having a group of people working together on democratic methodologies could be, in an interdisciplinary way and supporting one another would be fantastic.

**Kaz Stuart**

I think there's another really key step in research design on the research process, which is the analysis and I think that's often a sticky point for researchers where they feel like they should take ownership back where they might have had participants planning the whole project and generating data with them. But then at the analysis point, well, that's their expertise and knowledge that will come to the fore and handing analysis over to our participants or giving them equal power in analytical processes. I think that's really important.

**Charlotte Haines Lyon**

So I had quite an interesting experience with that, where I did do some analysis, and the participants were quite keen that I did the theory stuff. And that's how I was earning my PhD. But I would also take it back and they would go – that’s a load of rubbish. And we called it co-reflection, Cho and Trent, coined the phrase co-reflection, where I take it back. And actually, we went through another cycle almost of going through the transcripts together with some of my analysis, and them going well that doesn't quite make sense. And it was them bringing their experiences to the theory I’d applied and sort of rupturing it and disrupting that thinking again, and it often led to much deeper conversations about where they've been coming from originally. So it was far more in depth than member checking, because they were actually then sort of doing some analysis on top of my analysis. So it's quite a sort of back and forward, iterative process. But that was where the richness came from, possibly more so than earlier, the official data collection, if that makes sense. And it was a really exciting process for me –

**Debbie Rawls**

The research that I did for my PhD was parents, community members, students and staff of a school that had recently become a cooperative school. So I spoke to them all, you know, had separate focus groups with different groups. But the final part was really interesting, because I brought them together with the different responses, very different opinions about the school and there was quite a bit of insider outsider dynamic going on. A lot to do, actually, when you boiled it down about the Government discourse around schools and trying to set parents against schools in that sort of your school should be better. And you can set up your own school if it's not good enough, and that sort of thing. But that was a really, really interesting part of the research where when you asked, they never got the opportunity to do that, ever. So the children, there were representatives from the children's focus group, and the parents, the community, and then senior staff members. And it was a very, very interesting discussion, where they were able to speak frankly, about how they saw the school and why they saw it in that way, and come up with some plans for the future. So that was really valuable to bring together different perspectives I think.

**Charlotte Haines Lyon**

So putting it together a bit, what would you see is the key sort of aspects of democratic methodology? And what are the key sort of ethical issues that we need to consider as researchers?

**Kaz Stuart**

I think right at the beginning, Debbie was talking about trust, and some of the examples I've given you emphasise that time is needed for trust. And it seems like such a straightforward and obvious comment. But it's so often missed. I think that time and relationships are fundamental to the democratic processes.

**Debbie Rawls**

And I think, you know, the trust and the time needed to build a relationship in a particular type of relationship. So I would sort of say that whole thing around relational engagement and reciprocity, so again, traditional research often uses that sort of whole banking concept that we talk about in teaching. So you're just, you're either filling up with your expertise, or you-you're extracting information, rather than, you know, I think you learn more from your participants and they’re fantastic teachers and educators. That's why I want them in the academy. So I think that's sort of ongoing. The thing that's frustrating about a lot of research is that it's finite, the funding is finite. When you're building relationships and trying to build these sort of democratic approaches, that can be quite difficult, because you want to give the opportunity for that work, to be continued, for them to continue with what they were doing. And again, like I said, to, to continue to engage with the academy as the experts that they are and so that sort of like I say, that reciprocal relationship is really, really important, as well as obviously trust and time and respect. And academics as learners.

**Kaz Stuart**

Don't you think we have to be continually reflexive and just acutely aware of the power that we unconsciously hold on keep interrogating, you know, what assumptions am I making? What power am I holding? What am I withholding, accidentally? or intentionally? Yeah, and keep asking ourselves those really difficult questions. I think that's at the heart of the ethical process. And they're, they're similar kind of nuts and bolts of ethics. But as the ethical philosophy for me, it's about power sharing in its truest form, being authentic and relational.

**Charlotte Haines Lyon**

And I think for me, it's about disrupting power. Disruption is key to a lot of stuff that I do, which might be seen as quite problematic and doesn't necessarily fit with the usual ethical processes. But everything you've both talked about is about disrupting the status quo, disrupting the narrative. Debbie talked right at the beginning about how you understand democracy and to me democracy is disruptive. It isn't about all just putting something neat in a ballot box, although, as we've seen in recent times, ballot boxes can be disruptive in themselves. Yeah, there is something about that. So I suppose that brings me back to sort of democratic methodologies. I think a lot of people began with I've been talking a lot about participatory methods. What's the difference? I don't think we're saying that we are including or excluding or we're not participatory? Obviously, we are. But there's obviously something slightly different that we're saying that democratic methodologies isn't just about participation. So just wondering if you've got any thoughts around that.

**Debbie Rawls**

I think like Kaz said right at the beginning about, you know, the real focus on equity. So if you're talking about disruption, disrupting that sort of status quo and not treating everybody equally, because there are people who the system disadvantages, I would say, the political policies, and that they should be afforded more significance in our research. So that's a key thing. And that links directly with power, I think there has to be an explicit focus on power and redressing the balance of power, I would say that maybe isn't always there in participatory research –,

**Kaz Stuart**

Making research democratic in it process. I think is what we have been discussing and what I'm really passionate about, I think that does extend beyond just being participatory. And I also think that there's an interesting angle to exploring how research is a tool for democracy as well, and how we use it, where we deploy it, quite what social change, what disruption we can bring about through it.

**Debbie Rawls**

That's such an important point Kaz. And again, that what I found was really interesting, you talking about publications before, because what I found just in recent months, is changing that sort of focus on where I'm talking about my research and moving much more towards blogs and policy briefs, things like that, has brought my research into contact with so many more charities and groups and policymakers who we're working with lots of young people that my research affects, that putting it in our four star wouldn't get to any of these people who might be able to help in terms of funding and developing the ideas.

**Kaz Stuart**

So there may be another tension with the academy that not only just kind of publication in peer reviewed journals kind of demand more of that positivistic style of work. But it also demands that we use complicated words and theories and write in a kind of elitist academic tone. And if we're really being democratic about our research, we write in lay language, so it's accessible to everyone. And everyone can contribute to it. That I think there's a really interesting question about how democratic academic language is.

**Charlotte Haines Lyon**

I think we've covered a huge amount in there. I think you've both provided huge challenges for the academy and lots for us to think about. And I think possibly one of the things that I'm sort of thinking now, having listened to you both is maybe the biggest ethical conundrum is the disruption that democratic methodologies actually provides, in itself is quite an ethical issue. And sort of how you deal with the sort of fallout all the way through? Everything is sort of disrupting, isn't it or disruptive? Maybe that's something that we have to continue unpicking in everything that we do. I don’t know if you have any other thoughts.

**Debbie Rawls**

Just maybe that it would be great to see the academy value that more, value that disruption, rather than see it as some sort of threat or as not valid in some way. So I think the academy would be far richer, and more diverse and more inclusive and equitable, if it were to move in that direction.

**Charlotte Haines Lyon**

I think a really good way to end actually. I'd like to take the opportunity, obviously, to thank you both Debbie and Kaz for taking part and for all your insight in that it's been really interesting, and I hope that anybody listening might feel free to make comments, contact us and maybe sort of enrich this conversation and take the conversation further. Thank you.