

Using participatory methodologies for conducting literacy activities: conceptual issues, methodological alternatives and professional experiences

This special issue of *Information and Learning Science* is aimed at further establishing the connection between literacy-related activities (e.g. information literacy, digital literacy and media literacy) and the use of participatory methodologies to conduct such activities in a formal way. In this case, what we mean when we state “in a formal way” is related to the need to have a suitable and solid methodological basis for conducting literacy activities. This is something not always applied by practitioners in their institutions, where literacy activities are conducted mostly empirically, without much methodology behind them, nor with the use of data collection instruments or methods of analysis.

The connection between participatory methodologies and literacy activities is not usually made explicit in the available specialized literature either. However, some researchers argue that this relationship should be further explored and participatory methodologies, such as action research, should be especially established as the methodology of choice, given that participatory methodologies seek the improvement of participants' situations as a primary goal and all literacy activities are performed to improve a certain situation (e.g. people's use of information or technologies). In this context, this special issue includes a series of articles that explore the use of participatory methodologies, specifically action research and participatory action research. In some cases, for advancing the research areas related to literacies, and in others to report on the application of such methodologies in initiatives related to various literacies.

The first paper of this special issue *The use of participatory methodologies for conducting literacy activities: A perfect but not explicit fit* by Juan D. Machin-Mastromatteo, a Venezuelan academic from the Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua (Mexico), provides an introduction to this very specific area of research and practice, defining it, presenting its pros and cons, arguing about how adequate is to use participatory methodologies for literacies research and practice and, by using Scopus citation data, describing some trends of the specialized literature on this research area while finding out that this is an emerging research area that has been advancing from the year 2000.

Alejandro Uribe-Tirado and María Pinto, from the Universidad de Antioquia (Colombia) and the Universidad de Granada (Spain), respectively, present the paper *75 lessons learned for enhancing information literacy programs: From Ibero-America to universities worldwide*. This contribution extends the findings of Uribe-Tirado's PhD thesis, which is considered a flagship instance of information literacy research by Spanish-speaking and Portuguese-speaking researchers and practitioners. It seeks to establish how the 75 lessons that emerged from studying and analyzing information literacy programs from Latin America, Spain and Portugal are present in the specialized literature published by researchers from other regions. This framework of 75 lessons, although is not specifically framed within participatory methodologies, is a good example on reflective practice and how we can systematically study practice to further develop the research and theory of a given field, something that is largely sought by participatory methodologies. Moreover, this framework represents a worthwhile contribution toward the worldwide advancement of information literacy research and provides a useful roadmap for developing new information literacy initiatives or enhancing existing ones. Thus, it also promotes participatory approaches to information literacy education and research.



Developing academic librarians' skills in e-book services through Participatory Action Research by Valentina Gamboni, from the Università degli Studi di Perugia (Italy), summarizes the experience of a training initiative in the Centro Servizi Bibliotecari at The University of Perugia, which was implemented through a five-phase participatory action research. This experience sought to improve librarians' skills on working with e-book collections, from the understanding of the key issues and challenges they represent and constantly reflecting on their practices as librarians, by considering their weaknesses and areas of opportunity.

Jesús Cortés-Vera, Thelma J. Garcia and Alan Gutierrez, from the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez (Mexico), contribute the article *Knowing and improving paraphrasing skills of Mexican college students*, which recounts the use of participatory action research for studying paraphrasing competences in a group of first-year college students from Mexico and help them develop such competences. Their methodology consisted in applying a diagnostic questionnaire, planning an intervention and conducting it in the form of a workshop, and given the results obtained from the diagnostic, finally performing an evaluation to assess their improvement in paraphrasing through the use of a rubric. Interestingly, they found out that a complete rubric is not available, so they developed one for their research, by taking an incomplete rubric and enhancing it with ideas taken from various pertinent sources.

The challenges of scientific journalism according to Mexican university professors, newspaper directors and heads of research by Aixchel Cordero-Hidalgo, Javier Tarango, Claudia-Patricia Contreras and José R. Romo-González, from the Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua (Mexico), provides a starting point for studying scientific dissemination, an often-overlooked scientific activity, from a participatory action research perspective. This research is pertinent, as it seeks to discover the difficulties that professors and newspapers face regarding the publication of scientific content in mass media, from the perspectives of the main stakeholders involved, which is necessary, if we intend to improve societies' scientific literacy.

Hilary Hughes, Rike Wolf and Marcus Foth, from the Queensland University of Technology (Australia), provide the contribution titled *Informed digital learning through social living labs as participatory methodology: The case of Food Rescue Townsville*, which addresses the pressing and terrible problem of food waste. This article is part of the project *Fostering Digital Participation*, which studied how the methodology of social living labs (applied through participatory action research) can foster digital participation that involves digital literacy, informed learning and social change through collaboration in regional and rural communities; in this specific case, at Townsville, North Queensland and Australia. This contribution results in the valuable *Framework for Informed Digital Learning through Social Living Labs*, which is grounded on participatory action research and can be applied to other communities worldwide.

Last but not least, the article *Virtual world global collaboration: An educational quest* by Valerie Hill and K. Brant Knutzen, from the Texas Woman's University (USA) and the University of Hong Kong, respectively, details a live digital literacy experience based on a virtual world treasure hunt game that was developed in *Second Life*, created by librarians and educators, and conducted at a worldwide level. This application of participatory action research sought to study learning elements within three contexts: technological, pedagogical and content elements, which they denominated as a *Tri-fold Qualitative Research*. This methodological application was quite pertinent, given the participatory and experiential nature of using a video game-based learning environment.

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