

Developing Antenatal Education in Preparation for Motherhood - A Participatory Action Research Approach: Challenges related to Representation of Voice.

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Background

Antenatal education (ANE) is offered in maternity hospitals in Ireland with the premise that it prepares women for birth and motherhood. There is evidence to suggest however, that current ANE programmes do not reflect women's expectations and needs. This research is focused on working towards developing antenatal education that is grounded in the felt needs and life experiences of women, with a view to supporting women's decision-making processes, and understanding of pregnancy, birth and early motherhood. Until now, general planning and development of maternity care services in Ireland have involved minimal consultation with women as service users. Dialogue and active participation with women and antenatal educators to develop ANE is a significant focus of this study. A Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach is used informed by the conviction that all individuals have the right to actively contribute to the democratic development of policies and processes that affect them.

Key Focus of the Research

The key focus of the research is development of antenatal education in preparation for motherhood, based on knowledge that is created through collaboration with mothers to be, mothers and antenatal educators/facilitators.

Process

The co-researchers are women attending the chosen research site for maternity care and antenatal educators; midwives, physiotherapists and dieticians, who facilitate the ANE programme. Shared dialogue between women and facilitators is central to the design, implementation and analysis of the research, in addition to successful initiation and establishment of practice changes that are responsive and relevant for women.

The Focus of the Current Paper

This paper will focus on the opportunities and challenges that are presented by engaging and sustaining relationships with co-researchers, which are frequently tested and alter throughout the research process. Of key significance to this research is the notion of power, voice, honesty and integrity in relation to issues of representation, specifically in terms of how conversations are held and how knowledge that is created is shared with others. Relevant to this inquiry and for discussion are the crucial values of respect, dialogue, authentic collaboration and reciprocity, as well as a deep commitment to working together to address issues of significance for the principal people involved.

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