

# Praxis Intervention: An Alternative Approach to Development

Sunitha LF

**Abstract:** *Praxis intervention is a form of participatory action research. Praxis intervention model emphasizes working on the praxis potential and its Participants. "Praxis Potential "means members potential to reflexively work on their respective mentalities. Praxis intervention aims at leading its members through a "participant objectivation".The Praxis intervention method prioritizes unsettled the settled mentalities, especially where the settled mindsets prevalent in the social world or individuals is suspected to have sustained or contributed to their suffering or marginality. Praxis is intimately concerned with learning and reflection. By thinking about what one does in Practice, one does more than just accumulate knowledge. Praxis is an active and interdependent process which links the human mind with the external world through activity with others. Praxis has also been associated with critical theory, not because praxis is interested in changing the social order per se, but because it is a dialectical method that can bridge the theory-practice and object-subject gaps. In doing so, it can promote human integrity, freedom, and transformation through its recognition of the adaptability of human nature.*

**Keywords:** Praxis, participant objectivation, critical reflection, phronesis, clientele

## 1. Introduction

**"Our work is to solve problems, not merely to state the fact that there is a Problem, or point the finger at who caused the problem, or throw stones at the people that benefit from the problem...The single most radical action we can take, the most critical and revolutionary, is to invent a new and better way to do things. A way that changes the world and proves the limits of the old way by demonstrating new means of thinking and being." (Mau, 2004: 56)**

Praxis intervention is a methodological innovation. It believes in developing new paradigms of creative expression. These paradigms are such that challenges the unexplored era of mindsets, which form the voice of the mass and at times become a means of objective discrimination. The term has emerged to counter such mind sets and evolve with innovative means in achieving democratized development processes. It believes that any development process should bring security in society and security redefined as ecological sustainability, social equity and economic efficiency.

Praxis Intervention is a form of participatory action research. Where other forms of participatory action research emphasize the collective modification of the external world, the praxis intervention model emphasizes working on the *Praxis potential* (phronesis) of its participants (Madhu2005). "Praxis Potential" means the 'members' potential to reflexively work on their respective 'mentalities'; by 'participant' it is not just meant the clientele beneficiaries of the praxis intervention project alone, but also the organizers and experts participating in such a project. The praxis intervention aims at leading its members through a "participant objectivation". The praxis intervention method prioritizes unsettling the settled mentalities, especially where the settled mind sets prevalent in the social world or individuals is suspected to have sustained or contributed to their suffering or marginality.

This method takes participatory Action Research a step further and works on the 'participants' (i.e., everyone

involved in the study, including initiators, funders etc.) to reflexively work on their respective 'mentalities', in other words, develop a self-critical awareness (not just enacting change on the external world). This is based on Marx's notion of 'false consciousness' and is thought to be a possible way out of such a state. If false consciousness is not knowing or ignoring the ideological control that capitalism keeps in place, praxis intervention can wake us up and shake us in to consciousness.

Praxis has also been associated with critical theory, not because praxis is interested in changing the social order per se, but because it is a dialectical method that can bridge the theory-practice and object-subject gaps. In so doing, it can promote human integrity, freedom, and transformation through its recognition of the adaptability of human nature. Thus, praxis can be a liberating process, to the extent that it results in challenges that bring out contradictions in the current power structure.

The epistemological stance of praxis is that of a bridge between theory and practice. It is often thought that it is the process of reflection that brings theory to light, but reflection's effect on practice may remain stagnant without actuation in the form of Praxis. Thus, praxis can be particularized by its interactive nature. Its interactive nature, inturn, leads to its focus on that which is contemporaneous and critical.

## 2. Praxis intervention and Critical reflection

Praxis is as much concerned, then, with reflection in the here-and-now as it is with reflection before or after the experience. In the midst of performance, one learns to reframe unanticipated problems in order to see experience differently. For example, in the middle of a planning meeting, a team member might offer an image, use humour to describe a puzzling feature, attempt to bring out someone's prior opinion, or turn a problem upside down to free up the team to consider some new approaches.

**Critical reflection** : Praxis is often associated with critical agendas because of its potential to review and alter

misconstrued meanings found in conventional wisdom or in power relationships. It is a form of "heedful" action in which actors attentively and conscientiously take in to consideration data beyond their personal, interpersonal, and organizational assumptions. For example, we may assume that everyone has the psychological security of reflecting with others, but in fact this may not be the case for marginalized individuals or groups who may be uninvited to the table. We need to elucidate the barriers preventing learners from finding their voices or reaching their potential. We may also change ourselves as we identify and address the social, political, and cultural conditions that constrain self-insight.

### 3. Reasons of Praxis Intervention

Praxis Intervention makes research, creative expression or technology development into a bottom up process. It democratizes making of art, science, technology and critical conscience. The Praxis intervention method aims at provoking members to unsettle their settled mind sets and to have a fresh look at the world around and intervene. It is a process by which members are helped to reflexively recognize the arbitrary and discriminating mind sets within themselves and the world around and working towards correcting it is praxis intervention. It helps members to struggle against structurally ingrained discrimination.

It helps respondents to come out with answers which they would not have otherwise expressed. Questionnaire based surveys, formal interviews, and even focus group discussions are not useful to help respondents to come out with genuine answers to the questions posed at them. Praxis Intervention enable people in probing their own conditions phase by phase through prolonged discussions, experiments and conscious explorations which make them capable of coming out with better quality data that could be useful for the group to challenge existing epistemic structures and work out their own wellbeing.

### 4. Praxis intervention in Practice

"Praxis Intervention" as a practice involves working on the bias of the professionals and their clientele. It is a practical method of "objectifying objectification" on a collective basis (Maton). The Praxis Intervention method problematizes the bias of the researcher and her clientele emerging from their social origins, class, gender coordinates; the their position in the intellectual field and in their respective social space; and also their "intellectual bias, " the results of viewing the world as a spectacle.

In practice it involves the clientele and the researchers collectively probing into a problem that affects the clientele and helping the clientele to find solutions to their problem through reflexive probing with the experts belonging to relevant fields. The project aims at the clientele and the researchers work together and collectively learn from each other. Praxis Intervention can be carried out in phased manner. The first phase could involve orienting the clientele (and experts as well) of the problem under focus. The problem under focus could be anything like existing status of marginality, gender relation, health condition or status of

present technology etc. Once the problem could properly be oriented from as much angles as possible the clientele, experts and others could involve discussing appropriate method to probe the issue under discussion. They could also decide on the phases through which the collective probing to be undertaken. The second phase could be clientele exploring the issue themselves through the methods collectively agreed. They could maintain a journal to record their experiences and reflexive probing. The third phase could be the clientele coming together with experts and sharing their experience with their fellow clients and experts. After discussing all the observations and experiences the method of enquiry can be further fine-tuned for better understanding. Gradually the clientele could be guided to intervene on the issue concerned and document their experience. Their action and reflexion could be discussed and fine-tuned for further interventions. The phases and intervention strategies could be decided as it could be appropriate for different problems.

Praxis intervention method focuses on what happens to mind sets. In the community work situation it could be a project helping the community participants to undertake a systematic research on themselves in the areas such as history of their social relationships, land ownership patterns, critically exploring gender relations, studying the ecological changes happening in their habitat, learning historically and comparatively on their health status, nutrition status etc. The research undertook by the local residents can be converted into social actions or welfare projects.

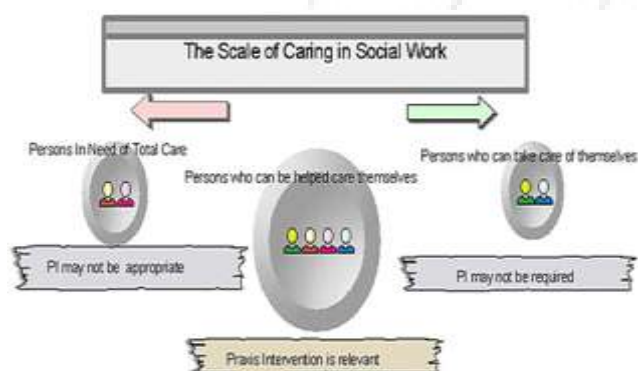
The practice of praxis intervention can be used in many fields such as post positivist research, social work research, Participatory action research, Local history research, Social action and social work projects, Clinical health research, Community Health research Projects, participatory technology development projects, and many other projects where people's participation and their critical reflexivity is crucial.

Praxis intervention can be used in helping patients to undergo a participatory diagnostic and experience sharing research with the medical professionals and other experts on their health conditions and take necessary action. Group of Patients suffering from similar diseases, their family members, and their significant others, medical practitioners and relevant experts can sit together and be guided through informed dialogue, systematic corrective measures, and experience sharing. In this process both the facilitating professionals and the patients can overcome their respective personal and professional bias.

The Praxis Intervention method could be extended to the professional social work practice in facilitating the social workers themselves and their clients overcoming personal or social mind sets that induce suffering or marginality. The praxis mode of social work depends on the sensibility that could be provoked in a given context: sensible towards one's own biography, historical locatedness, spatial positioning and the interaction setting. The praxis intervention practice has its implications for social work education. A social work education based on praxis model could shape the students and teachers self-reflexive, sensible. Through this method, it

may be possible for students gaining theoretical and practical skills. The method can be used in other branches of education and training like the management education, medical education, agriculture extension and other fields where the clientele really matter. However, the praxis model would be yielding better results if sufficient flexibility is maintained. It could be a model for providing companionship to people in need of self-exploration. Praxis intervention as a practice can be carried on to the extent it is possible for people to take care of themselves and to the extent people require professional companionship of the social work practice. Praxis intervention practice requires the professionals and the client participants to be self-reflexive and self-critical. The model provides opportunity for the social worker to undertake a reflexive inward journey to get rid of biases that affect her practice. The context that is not suitable for self-reflexivity or self-criticism is not suitable for praxis intervention practice either.

The praxis practice could also be extended to social work practice in the medical setting, AIDS care, psychiatric social work, management of juvenile delinquency, school social work, correctional administration practices in prison social work, gender related social work practice, geriatric social work, etc.



## 5. Relevance of Praxis intervention in social work

The method could be fruitful in working with the marginalized people as marginalisation is usually a historical phenomenon. This would avoid people losing self-respect and dignity under the conditions of marginalisation. The method could be applied in other conditions of marginalisation such as working with people discriminated on the basis of gender. It can also serve as a model for opportunity scanning. The praxis intervention can be used as a method to initiate and implement participatory project provided the project has sufficient flexibility inbuilt for effecting a change from its pre-designs. A project management from praxis perspective should not have full-fledged blue print beforehand, rather the projects should be flexible enough to wait till the participants themselves research and come out with a project plan. In the new practice, the experts could be facilitated to work with the participants. While a project is designed and carried out with this method, there should be options to change the course of project or even to suspend some projects according to the collective findings and evaluations of the collaborative

research. Similarly the praxis method could be used in the planning process provided sufficient flexibility is allowed and reflexivity is tolerated. It has to be further tested whether the model works with socially, economically, and culturally heterogeneous set of people.

The praxis intervention model of social intervention may not be applicable in all contexts. There are sections of people who cannot take care of themselves and hence require absolute external care. For example, persons suffering from progressive, irreversible diseases characterised by degeneration of the brain cells such as Alzheimer's disease would require complete external care. The praxis practice would be inappropriate for the people who do not need care. The approach could be helpful in accompanying people who can be helped to care for themselves. Praxis intervention practice is appropriate for working with the people who can be helped to care themselves with in a scale of caring.

## References

- [1] Archer, Margaret(2000), Being Human: The problem of Human Agency, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [2] Bordieu, Pierre (June 2003), "Participant Objectivation", Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute 9.2:281-294.
- [3] Feurbach, Ludwig, "Principles of the New Philosophy", Principles of the Philosophy of the Future: Trans. ZawahHanfi(1972).
- [4] J.Heron, Six category Intervention Analysis (Human Potential Research Project) University of Surrey, UK, 1975.
- [5] Madhu, p(2005), Towards a Praxis Model of Social Work: A Reflexive account of 'Praxis intervention with the Adivasis of Attappady. PhD Dissertation, kottayam, Mahatma Gandhi University.
- [6] Markovic, Mahilo(1974) From Affluence to Praxis; Boston: Beacon Press.
- [7] Sunitha.L.F, JRF Research Scholar, Department of Economics, University College, Thiruvananthapuram.