



PARCEO

Creative Practices in PAR: Framing

“Creative Practices in PAR: Framing” was designed by the Participatory Action Research Center for Education Organizing (PARCEO), an independent center that supports the work of community groups. All of PARCEO’s trainings are based on Participatory Action Research (PAR) and popular education which value the experience and leadership of those most affected by injustice as we collectively work to affect change and build community power.

PARCEO collaborates with a number of community-led organizations that work on creative projects or look for creative ways to engage with their participants. Based on the requests and interests of PARCEO’s collaborating groups, we created our Creative Practices in PAR Series.

The “Creative Practices in PAR: Framing” workshop explores framing and engages different modalities while addressing values central to PAR. This is the first of the Creative Practices in PAR series, where participants use a creative approach and develop arts-based skills to support work rooted in their wisdom and knowledge. All of our trainings end with collective reflection, where participants have a chance to share what they learned from the workshop and what they hope to continue to explore.

Goal of this training: Participants explore creative practices to include different voices and perspectives, generating and building knowledge together. In this training, participants practice how to interpret, create, and analyze images and recognize how framing impacts one’s understanding of a subject. Through storytelling and creative practices, participants recognize how they are experts in their own lives.

Objectives:

- Recognize how framing and composition impacts one's understanding of a subject
- Explore visual narrative techniques and different forms of storytelling
- Build trust in an environment where participants share aspects of themselves through visual storytelling
- Utilize different tools and methods for expression that support the inclusion of different languages, literacies, skill sets, and communication styles
- Recognize how documentation, storytelling, and image analysis connect to organizing and research
- Examine our definitions and relationships to our communities
- Understand how to interpret, create, and analyze images



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Creative Practices in PAR Training: Framing

Total time: 2 ½ - 3 hours

Goal of Session: Participants recognize the ways that framing connects to our expertise, positionality, and relationship to knowledge and understanding. This training explores how different forms of storytelling, composition, and visual narrative techniques can be used to strengthen one's organizing and research.

Materials

- Overview of PAR Handout
- Photograph for Visual Exercise (Helen Levitt image, or other)
- Markers/pens/colored pencils
- Paper
- Butcher/chart paper
- Magazines/posters/assorted materials
- Scissors
- Glue/tape

Preparation: facilitator activity (5 minutes)

Action: Facilitators write agenda on board or chart paper. Write instructions for the interactive introduction so participants can start to work on their piece as they trickle in.

- Create a paper-size poster to introduce yourself, based on the **Guiding Question**: "What creative practices do you use in your personal life?"

Responses can be as open as possible, including singing, cooking, cleaning, home decor, quilting, dancing, dressing, talking, gardening, drawing, and more.



Introduction and Interactive Icebreaker: group activity (20 minutes)

Framing: *Facilitators welcome the group, explain interactive icebreaker, guide introduction go-around, and provide a brief overview of the training. The interactive icebreaker activates the group's relationship to creative practices and serves as a reminder that we all engage in creative practices that may not be valued or recognized as such.*

Action: Facilitators welcome participants to the training. Give 10 minutes for participants to create their interactive icebreaker, then guide introductions.

Talking Point: Participants go around in a circle and share:

- Name
- Organization/affiliation
- How this training relates to their work/research/practice
- Presentation of Interactive Icebreaker

Connection to next activity: *Group creates guidelines for how they want to share the space together during the session.*

Guidelines: group activity (5 minutes)

Framing: *Together the group develops guidelines and community agreements for the session.*

Action: Facilitators write down community agreements and guidelines for how to engage in the session together. Some suggestions might include allowing for different forms of participation, use of participants' self-identified gender pronouns, etc.

Connection to next activity: *Using the group-generated community agreements, we can move on to the session, starting with an Overview of PAR and how it relates to creative practices.*



Overview of PAR: group and pair discussion (15 minutes)

Framing: Review core principles of PAR based on the Overview of PAR handout and group discussion. Participants consider what PAR is as a methodology and framework and how creative practices and PAR fit together.

Action: Facilitators Distribute **Overview of PAR handout**. Give participants a minute to read over the handout before guiding the group discussion based on PAR principles.

Talking Point: Facilitators guide discussion exploring the ways that creative practices support a PAR process. Listed below are some of the fundamental concepts of PAR that creative practices encourage:

- The expression of one's perspective
- The recognition and value of personal experience
- Generating and building knowledge together
- Inclusion of different kinds of voices, modes of expression, and forms of expertise
- Multiple avenues for engagement and participation

After group discussion, participants break into pairs to further draw connections between creative practices and a PAR process.

Action: After group discussion, participants break into pairs to discuss how creative practices help us understand and generate knowledge about ourselves (*question written on butcher paper/board*):

- How can creative practices help us understand and generate knowledge about ourselves?

Connection to next activity: With an understanding of PAR, participants engage in an image analysis exercise to practice framing and storytelling in a visual context.



Ways of Seeing: visual exercise (20 minutes)

Framing: *Inspired by Wendy Ewald's Literacy through Photography project. Participants are introduced to the concept of framing and storytelling by looking at an image with different interpretive and storytelling possibilities (Helen Levitt, Image 1).*

Talking Point: Facilitators share image and ask participants to examine details and list as many things that they notice in the photograph.

Guiding Questions (*written on butcher paper/board*):

- What is happening?
- What does this image tell us about the community?
- What do you notice?
- Who are these people?
- What are they doing?
- What are their relationships?

Action: Facilitators distribute or display picture (Helen Levitt image of people on the street, or any image of a community that has many people and things going on).

Facilitators record responses during group discussion about the different things that people see. Reiterate that what they see frames their understanding of the image, the people, the photographer etc.

Connection to next activity: *Participants continue to explore framing, what it is and how it can be used. Using the photograph, participants can make frames within the image that show and share different stories.*



Frame Exercise: group activity and discussion (20 minutes)

Framing: Based on the *Ways of Seeing* exercise, we see that a frame is a visual border within which one can create an image, story or message. Participants explore framing based on the previous discussion about how a frame allows one to create a particular reality within four corners. Participants think about what they choose to put in the center and what to exclude, how they create meaning and how messages are created for viewers.

Action: Facilitators draw a box on a sheet of paper, guide discussion and record answers.

Talking Point: This is an exercise on framing--how we see and how our activities and lives are framed by ourselves and others. **Facilitators** ask **Guiding Questions:**

- What does this look like? What could this be? Common responses are: "box," "window," "hole," "square," "border," "frame," "camera lens."
- What is a frame?
- What does it do?

Action: Facilitators show how to create a frame with the thumb and forefinger of each of their hands. Participants spend a minute or two framing things, people, and shapes in the room with their fingers or creating frames within the photograph from the last activity. In pairs, participants describe what they see with their partner. After a few minutes, **facilitators** bring everyone back together for a whole group discussion.

Talking Point: Facilitators emphasize that conscious decisions result in the image that is framed, which tells a particular story. **Guiding Questions:**

- What do you see?
- How does the frame affect what you see?
- Does it help to emphasize certain things? And minimize others?
- How does this connect to PAR principles discussed earlier?

Connection to next activity: Participants think about framing in relation to their communities and about how what is included and excluded from an image, story, or message, is a conscious choice.

Break (10 minutes)



Community Understanding: group activity (10 minutes)

Framing: We consider our own communities, how they are represented, and establish an understanding of what, where, and who we mean when we say community. This could be a much longer discussion, but here we use it to make connections between the framing exercise and to start generating thoughts about community representation in preparation for the next exercise.

Action: Facilitators write “community” on board/paper. Surrounding the word community, list participant responses to the questions listed below. Make connections to the responses and thoughts shared in the Frame exercise.

Talking point: Facilitators guide discussion based on these **Guiding Questions:**

- What comes to mind when we hear this word?
- What communities do you belong to?
- How are your communities represented?
- What is your best memory of an event or moment in your community?

Connection to next activity: With a group understanding of community, we think about framing and community representation. Participants create their own stories based on the previous discussions and framing exercises.

Community Self-portrait Preparation: pair discussion activity (5 minutes)

Framing: Participants think about how to create portraits that frame their own stories. Exploring and discussing with others helps generate stories that show expertise in one’s own life.

Talking Point: In pairs, participants discuss and make a list of meaningful memories or activities with their family or in their community. This can include an event, an experience with friends, a happy moment, a triumph, something they are proud of, a scary moment--the idea is to explore and make an image of something that the participants know about themselves and their community.

Action: Participants discuss with a partner and choose one of these activities or memories to depict through a collage. Participants write and talk freely without attention to structure. This is inspiration for the image-making exercise.

Connection to next activity: Participants decide what moment or activity they would like to depict.



Community Self-portrait Exercise: individual collage activity (25 minutes)

Framing: *Through a depiction of a memory or activity with their family or community, participants practice visual storytelling and recognize how they are experts on their own experience, their lives and their community.*

Talking Point: Facilitators ask participants to make a collage image that reflects or corresponds to the experience, activity, moment, or event discussed in the planning exercise.

Action: Participants create their own collage images based on what they discussed with their partner.

Connection to next activity: *After making collage portraits, participants share with the*

Self-portrait Exercise: group discussion and museum walk (25 minutes)

Framing: *Participants reflect on their collage, share the image with the group, and title it, if they want. Sharing supports the development of narratives and allows participants to learn from each other and build community knowledge.*

Talking Point: Facilitators ask participants to consider the collage and the process of making their image. **Guiding Questions:**

- What is this picture?
- Who is in this picture?
- How does this image make you feel?
- How did making this portrait connect to PAR principles?

Action: Participants consider the questions and write word responses and titles on or next to the image, if they want. **Facilitators** guide the group discussion as participants share reflections on their collages. After discussion, participants can display their collages on the walls, walk around, and share with the group.

Connection to next activity: *Participants reflect on and share what they learned, practiced, and experienced in the workshop.*



Closing: group activity (15 minutes)

Framing: *Collectively, participants share their reflections of the day in order to highlight the group's collective knowledge, gauge participants' level of understanding, and areas for further exploration.*

Talking Points: Facilitators guide group discussion as participants share responses to prompts (*written on butcher paper/board*):

- Something that inspired or challenged them
- One thing that they would like to see more or less of next time

Actions: Participants take turns sharing reflections, thoughts, and feedback with the whole group.

Connection to next activity: *Participants share, unwind, and connect with each other.*

Food: optional group activity (15+ minutes)

Framing: *Food is a creative expression. In advance of the training, ask the participants to bring a dish that they enjoy eating with their family or community. The dish can be very simple and low pressure.*

Talking Points: Participant talk about the dish they brought and why they enjoying eating it with their community or family.

Guiding Questions:

- When are the moments you eat this dish?
- Do you have any special memories connected to this dish?

Action: Eat, share and talk together.





What is PAR?

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a framework for engaging in research and organizing for social justice that is rooted in a community's own knowledge, wisdom, and experience. PAR recognizes that those most impacted by systemic injustice are in the best position to understand and analyze their needs and challenges and to organize for social change.

In a PAR-generated process:

The outcomes can **take many shapes** and forms depending on what the group determines together, but it is the group's own agenda and not someone else's.

We engage in **collective research and organizing** to build community and make change.

The work is about **generating and building knowledge together** in order to define the change we seek to make. This begins with telling our own stories, which centers our own experiences.

Community members are recognized as experts, and all participants are considered both teachers and learners. Too often, outside "experts" come in to identify and address a community's problems, and PAR challenges this notion of who has the expertise.

We work intentionally and always think carefully about **whose voices are being heard, who is making decisions, and how we are moving forward**. We consider our roles, position, and privilege in relation to changing conditions of injustice.

Like popular education, it is a broad framework that is **participatory, collective, critical, and reflective**, building from the work of Orlando Fals-Borda, Paulo Freire, and many others. It is not a neutral process and actively builds community strength and leadership to change unjust conditions.





Visual Exercise: Ways of Seeing

Helen Levitt, *A Way of Seeing* NYC c. 1940



Agenda

- Welcome and Introductions
- Guidelines
- Overview of PAR and Creative Practices
- Ways of Seeing
- Framing Exercise
- Break
- Defining Community
- Self-Portrait
- Closing



