PARCEO

PAR Overview
Emphasis on Mutuality, Social Transformation, and Storytelling

Framing: The purpose of this activity is for participants to explore and develop their understanding of PAR, particularly the principles of mutuality, social transformation, and the importance of storytelling through a small group discussion of a PAR quote, and relating it to their own experiences. Participants also have a chance to depict their experiences of PAR-in-action in a creative way. Taken from the training "Building a Foundation: An Introduction to PAR".

Time: 50 minutes

Materials:
- Why PAR Handout, copies for all participants
- Quote Handout, 2 quotes per small group
- Chart Paper
- Markers

Group Size: 4 or more

Activity

Opening: (5 minutes)

Brief description of PAR
Framing: Through an overview and background of PAR, participants consider key vocabulary that will be unpacked in greater detail through the main activity.

Talking Points: Facilitator A define the key terms, inviting feedback and responses from the group.

- **Mutuality** generates knowledge together, and recognizes wisdom and expertise without privileging one voice over another. Mutuality also recognizes that the experiences of those most impacted by injustice should be at the center of the discussion.
- **Social Transformation** makes change through community power in which the community is at the forefront. This is different from outside "experts" coming in and setting the agenda.
- **Storytelling** shares personal experiences in an interactive process where everyone's story is valued. Through storytelling connections are made, common experiences are threaded, and community is built.

Connection to Next Activity: *The overview and key terms are the base for discussions during the activity.*

Main Activity:

PAR Quotes - 40 minutes (15 minutes to meet; 25 minutes to report back)
Facilitator's note:*If you have a smaller group, you may want to give more time for the small group discussion and less time to report back)*

Small Group Discussion (15 minutes)
Actions: Participants break into small groups. **Facilitator B** ask each group to choose two quotes from the Quote Handout that stand out to them. Group members work together to read and discuss their quotes and then create a visual representation (diagram, scene, etc.) of what PAR looks like to them.

Large Group Discussion (25 minutes)
Action: Group comes back together to share their piece with the larger group.

Facilitator's Note: *PAR is modeled when each small group shares reflections, stories and drawings with the whole group.*

Talking Points: **Facilitator A** encourage groups to consider what was shared in the overview of PAR and how it connects to these quotes. The facilitators encourage groups to think about how these quotes reflect the key terms: Mutuality, Social Transformation, and Storytelling as they share out.

Closing: (5 minutes)

Framing: *The purpose of participants sharing their reflections is to highlight the group's collective knowledge and gauge their level of understanding and areas for further exploration.*

Talking Points: **Facilitator A** ask participants to share one thing that moved or challenged them and one thing they would like to consider more.

Actions: Participants take turns sharing their reflections with the whole group. **Facilitator B** take notes on chart paper.

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What is PAR?

From PARCEO's Facilitation Training

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.

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PAR Quotes

Facilitator Note: Before the session, go through the following quotes and pick several that you feel are relevant to the groups and individuals participating in the activity. During the activity, each group will choose two quotes to discuss and share with the whole group. You can choose as many or as few quotes to share with the groups.

a) Storytelling:

"We come from the oral tradition of storytelling, which requires a telling and a listening passed on from our ancestors, elders, and family. Our stories have the power to heal and to transform ourselves and our communities. They convey our history, lessons, culture and spirit."

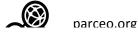> - Elvira and Hortensia Colorado, Coatlique Theatre Company

"Stories go in circles. They don't go in straight lines. It helps if you listen in circles because there are stories inside and between stories, and finding your way through them is as easy and as hard as finding your way home. Part of finding is getting lost, and when you are lost you start to open up and listen."

> - Tafoya, 1995, cited in Shawn Wilson, "Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods"

c) Primacy of Experience:

"I go out on the lake to pull the net, and this is PAR within an Indigenous knowledge paradigm. My father, who passed in 1988 to the spirit world, comes and has this conversation with me: "You have to bring the kids, my grandchildren. You have to bring them here so they can fish like this. They have to have the experience, they can't learn without the experience. You can talk about it but that is nothing, it doesn't mean a thing. They have to do it and they have to do it repeatedly." Repeatedly, because if you try to do it only once, it is not going to be part of who you are. In other words, you will not be transformed, and you will not be enhancing somebody else's experiences, which is what transformation is about."

> - Cora Weber-Pillwax, "When Research Becomes a Revolution: Participatory Action Research with Indigenous Peoples"

"It is not enough to be in opposition. We also need to generate alternative knowledge and images, making new visions out of the mud of our current interpretations."

    - dian marino, *Wild Gardens*

d) Transformation:

"Social science needs to be socially just in its processes as well as its outcomes."

    - Cynthia Chambers and Helen Balanoff, "Translating Participation from North to South: A Case against Intellectual Imperialism in Social Science Research"

"When I write it feels like I'm carving bone. It feels like I'm creating my own face, my own heart— a Nahuatl concept. My soul makes itself through the creative act. It is constantly remaking and giving birth to itself through my body. It is this learning to live with la Coatlicue that transforms living in the Borderlands from a nightmare into a numinous experience. It is always a path/state to something else."

    - Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*

e) Learning is Political and Engaged:

"Learning is not a neutral process – staying idle is maintaining a position, just as movement is never directionless."

    - dian marino, Wild Garden