

Student Comments

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"The aim of inquiry is not to establish the truth or to describe what really is happening but to reveal the different truths and realities—constructions—held by different individuals and groups." —Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research*

We All Stand to Gain: Voices from the PAR Projects

"I think that the main insight I have acquired at this time is that PAR is a very diverse activity. Because it involves collaborating with people in the field, it takes many forms. I find that every article I read, story I hear, and day in the field changes my understanding of what PAR is...In my understanding the thing that ties all the different models and my experience together is the source of knowledge...I have gained insight into how this kind of [local] knowledge can facilitate change and empower those who hold it."

"It made me realize my worth."

Lana Regat, Undergraduate Student

"Nothing will EVER go as you expect.... Imagine you are rafting a river and rather than trying to steer, just follow the flow. People will appreciate you more than you know."

"I had two PAR epiphanies today... The second epiphany is about enthusiasm. If I just say, 'I would like to come to your center and conduct some focus groups; will you help me do that?' She will say, 'Uh...okay...' But if I say, 'I am engaged in some community-based innovative action research with the public library and we want to involve your community in imagining what the library can be to better serve Bellingham as a whole!' then she will probably get more excited. Suddenly, it's not about her helping me. She is involved in something meaningful to her center."

Rowenn Kalman, Graduate Student

"It's not just a project to me."

"What I REALLY understand about PAR is how easy it is to fool oneself. Real PAR happens from the bottom-up. That does not mean polarizing the situation by promoting oneself as the 'voice of the proletariat,' or by allowing oneself to become a management lackey. Such positions only heighten distinctions of duality."

Bob Wunschel, Undergraduate Student

"By answering questions and taking pictures, youth were becoming aware of their reality. In most of our interactions with focus group youth the initial answers were reflexive and somewhat flip. As the conversation progressed, they gave more thoughtful, insightful answers—sometimes the complete opposite of their original response. I think the reason for this is due to the 'group ownership' aspect of PAR."

"...The open ended (or cyclical) nature of PAR seems important to me... I like the idea that the project doesn't belong solely to me. I like that I am one of many participants to contribute to this project of mapping the health of the living conditions for youth in Whatcom County. And also in the larger picture, I like the fact that the project doesn't necessarily have to "succeed" for the PAR process to be successful. I like how PAR emphasizes the value of change by examination. Our act of attempting to define problems and describe how things are currently is already creating benefits for all of us. I think this aspect of PAR is important to me now because it enables me to step back and see how a series of seemingly small and mundane interactions have had a positive effect in creating change. "

Mary Haycox, Graduate Student

"PAR is an organism. It grows and evolves, and it cannot be contained in a rigid structure like a classroom."

"It's like this research had a life of its own."

Derik Dunning, Graduate Student

"I found out that though you can organize a project as perfectly and efficiently as possible, no amount of organization can prepare you for what may happen."

Advice for next year's PAR students: "Be FLEXIBLE!!! Be patient, be understanding, be FLEXIBLE, be helpful, be a partner/facilitator NOT a boss/director, be energetic, and never forget to be FLEXIBLE!"

Stephanie Newby, Undergraduate Student

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