

Why PAR is PARticularly Appropriate for Anthropology

While cultural anthropologists have always spent time with people to learn about their lives, and applied anthropology has encouraged anthropologists to use the skills and insight of their training to improve people's lives, past forms of anthropology have typically not encouraged anthropologists to share their skills, training and access to resources with others as *co-researchers*. Yet, the results of people generating and answering questions that are important to them, coupled with decisions based on the findings that lead to action are powerful means for effecting desired change, most importantly because the people become true stakeholders to the process. The relevancy for such work seems enormously apparent in light of the many challenges people in all kinds of communities face today.

Participatory Action Research, an approach with a rich if relatively recent history, is now championed by many professional practitioners of varied educational backgrounds. As a research strategy and means of learning about the realities of people's lives, PAR seems particularly well-suited for contemporary anthropology students who, along with many professional anthropologists, are questioning and rejecting the motives and approaches of historical anthropology in favor of an anthropology with greater relevancy for today's world.

PAR gives students an opportunity to abandon the authoritarian and distanced stance of former anthropologists who historically were trained in a discipline largely built upon Western imperialist relations with it "subjects." (The authoritarian, expert stand of the professional *via-à-vis* his/her subjects is one common to the history of other academic disciplines as well.) Instead, PAR gives students an opportunity to meaningfully embrace an ideal that recognizes everyone as equally valuable and worthy of respect.

Since PAR encourages all people to recognize the power of their knowledge, their ability to investigate questions meaningful to them, and their capacity to collaborate with others to create positive changes, PAR opens the way for students to learn from community partners and to participate in research relevant to community members. Students learn ways to collaborate with others which will be very beneficial to them in future work roles and as members of communities.

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