

Encyclopedia of Evaluation

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

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PAR has been described as a three-pronged activity involving investigation, education, and action. Research is conceived of as a developmental process in which, through the involvement of less-powerful stakeholders in investigation, reflection, negotiation, decision making, and knowledge creation, individual participants and power dynamics in the sociocultural milieu are changed. Evaluators using PAR discover that it is more than performing particular types of activities; it becomes part of who they are, because working in this way involves a commitment to a set of values and principles beyond the simple act of collecting and understanding information. PAR is far more than a methodology; it involves a focus on process and a commitment to action. Participatory evaluation (PE) has emerged at least partly from PAR.

PAR emerged in the early 1970s, primarily, but not exclusively, in the developing world. This was, in part, a reaction to positivist models of inquiry that were seen as exploitive and detached from the urgent social and economic problems that people in much of the world were facing. Although PAR has spread to university classrooms and texts and, more recently, to major multilateral institutions, it is deeply rooted in community and international development, adult education, and, more recently, the women's movement. In North America, important work has been done at the *Highlander Center for Research and Education*.

Key concepts and principles include the following:

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Further Reading

Hall, B. L. From margins to center? The development and purpose of participatory research *American Sociologist* vol. 24 no. (4) pp. 15–28. (1992)

Maguire, P. (1987) *Doing participatory research: A feminist perspective*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts, Center for International Education.