PAR is the ultimate in social justice practice. I suggest that PAR should be the basis for all nursing research. This book will provide you with the basics for getting started.

— Patricia J. Kelly, PhD, MPH, APRN

University of Missouri–Kansas City

Participatory action research is a qualitative research method conducted in collaboration with a community of people in order to effect changes in the community that are relevant to the residents. This is a practical, “how-to” resource for conducting participatory action research that guides readers, step by step, through planning, conducting, and disseminating nursing research using this qualitative design. It is part of a unique series of seven books devoted to nursing research using qualitative designs and methods. Examples from actual research along with author commentary illustrate potential pitfalls and challenges that may occur during the process and how to resolve them.

Written by a leading scholar of nursing research and nurse experts in participatory action research, the book describes its philosophical underpinnings and state-of-the-art techniques, and provides a concrete road map for planning and conducting studies. It considers why this particular research method is best suited for a particular study, ethical considerations, and potential obstacles. The book also discusses how to ensure rigor during a study, providing examples from scholarly literature and the authors' own work. Each case example features a description of the study, including why the investigator decided to use participatory action rather than another research design, how he or she solved gatekeeper and access-to-sample issues, and institutional review board concerns. Also included is a discussion of how to collect and analyze data and how to disseminate findings to both the scientific community and research participants. With a focus on practical problem solving throughout, the book will be of value to novice and experienced nurse researchers, graduate teachers, in-service educators, students, and nursing research staff at health care institutions.

Key Features:
• Describes, step by step, how to plan, conduct, and disseminate participatory action research
• Delivers new designs and methods
• Focuses on solving practical problems related to the conduct of research
• Features rich nursing exemplars in a variety of health/mental health clinical conditions in the United States and internationally

Mary de Chesnay, PhD, RN, PMHCNS-BC, FAAN, Editor
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QUALITATIVE DESIGNS AND METHODS IN NURSING

Mary de Chesnay, PhD, RN, PMHCNS-BC, FAAN, Series Editor

Nursing Research Using Ethnography: Qualitative Designs and Methods in Nursing
Nursing Research Using Grounded Theory: Qualitative Designs and Methods in Nursing
Nursing Research Using Life History: Qualitative Designs and Methods in Nursing
Nursing Research Using Phenomenology: Qualitative Designs and Methods in Nursing
Nursing Research Using Historical Methods: Qualitative Designs and Methods in Nursing
Nursing Research Using Participatory Action Research: Qualitative Designs and Methods in Nursing
Nursing Research Using Data Analysis: Qualitative Designs and Methods in Nursing

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For Dr. Joanne White and her husband, Dr. Richard White, whose efforts in Nicaragua exemplify the spirit of participatory action research and who inspired others to conduct these kinds of studies.

—MdC
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Foreword

Nursing is a doing profession. We want to make life better for our patients, their families, and the communities in which they live. We do interventions. Participatory action research (PAR) provides us with two important principles for these interventions.

The first of these principles is participation and the importance of partnering with those being researched. Participants know their lives and their issues, and including—no, partnering with—these participants makes for extremely relevant research results. Just as we do patient-centered care, as nurses our focus should be on participant-centered research. We do not collect data and run. We give back to our participants and ensure that they have gained something from their interactions with researchers beyond the $10 gift card we are able to provide. While we as researchers have been privileged with the education that enables us to conduct research, participants have lived what we are investigating and studying. The exchange of expertise that happens in PAR projects ensures that we all benefit.

The second principle is action, with social change as a critical part of the outcome process of PAR. Action can focus on health issues (most common for nurses), around community issues such as environmental pollution, or around political and economic issues. Sustainability is an important part of action, since change occurs slowly. Can the curriculum or program that was implemented by the community group continue? Can participants use the information that they learned to secure legislative action? Can changes in healthy behaviors for individuals or communities endure? PAR outcomes move beyond the generation and dissemination of knowledge through manuscripts to include presentations and articles in venues accessible to members of the “researched” group, whether they are cancer survivors, incarcerated women, or whole communities linked by geography, demographics, or common interests.
Implementation of a PAR project is highly stimulating and demanding. Make no mistake: PAR is not necessarily an easy endeavor for a nurse researcher. But the results bring satisfaction on a professional, personal, and group or community level. One of the exciting things about PAR is its flexibility—qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, ethnography, and needs assessments are all easily incorporated and welcomed. Your intellectual acumen will be put to the test as you consider which methods will be best suited for the goals of your project and how your community can be effectively trained. Attention must be simultaneously paid to both process and outcomes. But, as nurse researchers, we live in two worlds—that of our patients/clients/participants and that of academia. It is indeed a privilege to be able to move back and forth between both of these worlds.

Challenges do exist. Institutional review boards may not appreciate the fact that we want all participants to also serve as data collectors and be part of the analysis process. Getting everyone certified in the basics of the protection of human subjects can be unwieldy, but it is possible. Figuring out how to train members of the researched group to give presentations, to be the voice for local publicity about a project, and to include them in manuscript writing takes time and dedication to the task. It is also extremely rewarding to watch the development of voices among individuals who have been ignored in previous or traditional research processes.

PAR is the ultimate in social justice practice. I suggest that PAR should be the basis for all nursing research. This book will provide you with the basics for getting started. Good luck and enjoy!

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In this section, which is published in all volumes of the series, we discuss some key aspects of any qualitative design. This is basic information that might be helpful to novice researchers or those new to the designs and methods described in each chapter. The material is not meant to be rigid and prescribed because qualitative research by its nature is fluid and flexible; the reader should use any ideas that are relevant and discard any ideas that are not relevant to the specific project in mind.

Before beginning a project, it is helpful to commit to publishing it. Of course, it will be publishable because you will use every resource at hand to make sure it is of high quality and contributes to knowledge. Theses and dissertations are meaningless exercises if only the student and committee know what was learned. It is rather heart-breaking to think of all the effort that senior faculty have exerted to complete a degree and yet not to have anyone else benefit by the work. Therefore, some additional resources are included here. Appendix A for each book is a list of journals that publish qualitative research. References to the current nursing qualitative research textbooks are included so that readers may find additional material from sources cited in those chapters.

**FOCUS**

In qualitative research the focus is emic—what we commonly think of as “from the participant’s point of view.” The researcher’s point of view, called “the etic view,” is secondary and does not take precedence over what the participant wants to convey, because in qualitative research, the focus is on the person and his or her story. In contrast, quantitative
researchers take pains to learn as much as they can about a topic and focus the research data collection on what they want to know. Cases or subjects that do not provide information about the researcher’s agenda are considered outliers and are discarded or treated as aberrant data. Qualitative researchers embrace outliers and actively seek diverse points of view from participants to enrich the data. They sample for diversity within groups and welcome different perceptions even if they seek fairly homogenous samples. For example, in Leenerts and Magilvy’s (2000) grounded theory study to examine self-care practices among women, they narrowed the study to low-income, White, HIV-positive women but included both lesbian and heterosexual women.

PROPOSALS

There are many excellent sources in the literature on how to write a research proposal. A couple are cited here (Annersten, 2006; Marenor, 2012; Martin, 2010; Schmelzer, 2006), and examples are found in Appendices B, C, and D. Proposals for any type of research should include basic elements about the purpose, significance, theoretical support, and methods. What is often lacking is a thorough discussion about the rationale. The rationale is needed for the overall design as well as each step in the process. Why qualitative research? Why ethnography and not phenomenology? Why go to a certain setting? Why select the participants through word of mouth? Why use one particular type of software over another to analyze data?

Other common mistakes are not doing justice to significance and failure to provide sufficient theoretical support for the approach. In qualitative research, which tends to be theory generating instead of theory testing, the author still needs to explain why the study is conducted from a particular frame of reference. For example, in some ethnographic work, there are hypotheses that are tested based on the work of prior ethnographers who studied that culture, but there is still a need to generate new theory about current phenomena within that culture from the point of view of the specific informants for the subsequent study.

Significance is underappreciated as an important component of research. Without justifying the importance of the study or the potential impact of the study, there is no case for why the study should be conducted. If a study cannot be justified, why should sponsors fund it? Why should participants agree to participate? Why should the principal investigator bother to conduct it?
COMMONALITIES IN METHODS

Interviewing Basics

One of the best resources for learning how to interview for qualitative research is by Patton (2002), and readers are referred to his book for a detailed guide to interviewing. He describes the process, issues, and challenges in a way that readers can focus their interview in a wide variety of directions that are flexible, yet rigorous. For example, in ethnography, a mix of interview methods is appropriate, ranging from unstructured interviews or informal conversation to highly structured interviews. Unless nurses are conducting mixed-design studies, most of their interviews will be semistructured. Semistructured interviews include a few general questions, but the interviewer is free to allow the interviewee to digress along any lines he or she wishes. It is up to the interviewer to bring the interview back to the focus of the research. This requires skill and sensitivity.

Some general guidelines apply to semistructured interviews:

- Establish rapport.
- Ask open-ended questions. For example, the second question is much more likely to generate a meaningful response than the first in a grounded theory study of coping with cervical cancer.

  Interviewer: Were you afraid when you first heard your diagnosis of cervical cancer?

  Participant: Yes.

Contrast the above with the following:

  Interviewer: What was your first thought when you heard your diagnosis of cervical cancer?

  Participant: I thought of my young children and how they were going to lose their mother and that they would grow up not knowing how much I loved them.

- Continuously “read” the person’s reactions and adapt the approach based on response to questions. For example, in the interview about coping with the diagnosis, the participant began tearing so the interviewer appropriately gave her some time to collect herself. Maintaining silence is one of the most difficult things to learn for researchers who have been classically trained in quantitative methods. In structured interviewing, we are trained to continue despite distractions and
to eliminate bias, which may involve eliminating emotion and emotional reactions to what we hear in the interview. Yet the quality of outcomes in qualitative designs may depend on the researcher–participant relationship. It is critical to be authentic and to allow the participant to be authentic.

Ethical Issues

The principles of the Belmont Commission apply to all types of research: respect, justice, beneficence. Perhaps these are even more important when interviewing people about their culture or life experiences. These are highly personal and may be painful for the person to relate, though I have found that there is a cathartic effect to participating in naturalistic research with an empathic interviewer (de Chesnay, 1991, 1993).

Rigor

Readers are referred to the classic paper on rigor in qualitative research (Sandelowski, 1986). Rather than speak of validity and reliability we use other terms, such as accuracy (Do the data represent truth as the participant sees it?) and replicability (Can the reader follow the decision trail to see why the researcher concluded as he or she did?).

DATA ANALYSIS

Analyzing data requires many decisions about how to collect data and whether to use high-tech measures such as qualitative software or old-school measures such as colored index cards. The contributors to this series provide examples of both.

Mixed designs require a balance between the assumptions of quantitative research while conducting that part and qualitative research during that phase. It can be difficult for novice researchers to keep things straight. Researchers are encouraged to learn each paradigm well and to be clear about why they use certain methods for their purposes. Each type of design can stand alone, and one should never think that qualitative research is less than quantitative; it is just different.

Mary de Chesnay
REFERENCES

Preface

Qualitative research has evolved from a slightly disreputable beginning to wide acceptance in nursing research. Approaches that focus on the stories and perceptions of the people, instead of what scientists think the world is about, have been a tradition in anthropology for a long time and have created a body of knowledge that cannot be replicated in the lab. The richness of human experience is what qualitative research is all about. Respect for this tradition was long in coming among the scientific community. Nurses seem to have been in the forefront, and though many of my generation (children of the 1950s and 1960s) were classically trained in quantitative techniques, we found something lacking. Perhaps because I am a psychiatric nurse, I have been trained to listen to people tell me their stories, whether the stories are problems that nearly destroy the spirit, or uplifting accounts of how they live within their cultures, or how they cope with terrible traumas and chronic diseases. It seems logical to me that a critical part of developing new knowledge that nurses can use to help patients is to find out first what the patients themselves have to say.

In this volume, the focus is participatory action research (PAR). The chapter authors have made a point of providing the philosophical orientation to PAR as well as first-person accounts of their own studies. PAR is a type of method that should be quite comfortable for nurse researchers since we are accustomed to close interaction with communities. Advocating for patients is consistent with partnering with communities to accomplish health goals. Similarly, community leaders should be comfortable with nurse researchers who tend to give as much as they take when conducting research in communities. For example, our faculty at Duquesne University wanted to conduct research in the local poor community near the university, and in exchange for cooperation, the faculty taught CPR classes.
Other volumes address ethnography, grounded theory, life history, historical research, phenomenology, and data analysis. The volume on data analysis also includes material on focus groups and case studies, and two types of research that can be used with a variety of designs, including quantitative research and mixed designs. Efforts have been made to recruit contributors from several countries to demonstrate global applicability of qualitative research.

There are many fine textbooks on nursing research that provide an overview of all the methods, but our aim here is to provide specific information to guide graduate students and experienced nurses who are novices in the designs represented in this series in conducting studies from the point of view of our constituents—patients and their families. The studies conducted by contributors provide much practical advice for beginners as well as new ideas for experienced researchers. Some authors take a formal approach, but others speak quite personally in the first person. We hope you catch their enthusiasm and have fun conducting your own studies.

Mary de Chesnay
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In any publishing venture, there are many people who work together to produce the final draft. The contributors kindly share their expertise to offer advice and counsel to novices, and the reviewers ensure the quality of submissions. All of them have come up through the ranks as qualitative researchers and their participation is critical to helping novices learn the process.

No publication is successful without great people who not only know how to do their own jobs but also how to guide authors. At Springer Publishing Company, we are indebted to Margaret Zuccarini for the idea for the series, her ongoing support, and her excellent problem-solving skills. The person who guided the editorial process and was available for numerous questions, which he patiently answered as if he had not heard them a hundred times, was Joseph Morita. Also critical to the project were the people who proofed the work, marketed the series, and transformed it to hard copies, among them Jenna Vaccaro and Kris Parrish.

At Kennesaw State University, Dr. Tommie Nelms, Director of the WellStar School of Nursing, was a constant source of emotional and practical support in addition to her chapter contribution to the phenomenology volume. Her administrative assistant, Mrs. Cynthia Elery, kindly assigned student assistants to complete several chores, which enabled the author to focus on the scholarship. Bradley Garner, Chadwick Brown, and Chino Duke are our student assistants and unsung heroes of the university.

Finally, I am grateful to my cousin, Amy Dagit, whose expertise in proofreading saved many hours for some of the chapters.

If we are together, nothing is impossible.

—Winston Churchill
CHAPTER ONE

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Karen Lucas Breda

If you are interested in helping to create meaningful change in a system or with a group of people, then you may want to read on. If you would like to find a method of research that genuinely involves the “subjects” in the research process, then you may want to read on. If you are looking for a research method that is collaborative and participatory and unlike most other forms of research, then you may want to read on. Participatory action research (PAR) does all of this and more.

PAR is a form of research that includes the research subjects in a meaningful way in every step of the research process. Research subjects are called “participants” in PAR because they are included as members of the team in every phase of the research process. The philosophy of PAR is that participants hold knowledge and are able to lend important advice and guidance to researchers. This democratizes the research process and radically changes the nature of the relationship between researchers and subjects.

The PAR methodology challenges almost all of our preconceptions about scientific research (especially concepts such as bias and objectivity). It turns what we thought we knew about the research process on its head, upside down and inside out. Some purely quantitative researchers have trouble understanding the participatory nature of PAR and may not consider it a legitimate method. Yet PAR is a form of research that is easily incorporated into existing programs and organizations. It can produce results that are highly efficacious, relevant, and sustainable.

Why conduct research to create change when it is possible to simply do projects to create change outside of the research process? All scientific research is systematic and has the ability to produce knowledge that can advance science. PAR can produce a unique type of knowledge that advances both the science and the discipline in which it is carried out. It is particularly relevant for the applied sciences and the social sciences.
where intricate human relationships are at stake. Nursing is a young science that can benefit from learning about and understanding as many forms of inquiry as possible. Only then can nurse researchers and scholars have a wide enough repertoire to choose the proper research methods for research problems and questions.

WHAT IS PAR?

PAR is a type of participatory and cooperative inquiry that has increased in popularity in the social sciences over the last 2 decades. As a methodology, PAR is holistic and egalitarian. As one of several methods under the rubric of “participatory inquiry,” PAR stands out for its connection with political aspects of producing knowledge (Reason, 1994).

PAR is a highly practical, contemporary, and relevant form of research because it allows researchers not only to involve participants in every step of the research process but also to give them a voice and a meaningful role in the actions that emerge from the research study. PAR fits beautifully into the applied sciences and particularly into the discipline and science of nursing because of its holistic, collaborative, and applied nature. Many research problems relevant to nursing science involve the complexity of human behavior and straddle the boundaries of behavioral and social research. PAR is one of several action-oriented methodologies that can respond to research questions requiring social action and change. In recent years, PAR has taken hold in nursing and has grown considerably in popularity.

This chapter provides you with a brief history of PAR and guides you on the path of understanding how and when to use it. Chapter 2 of this volume treats the state of the art of PAR in nursing literature and explicates some of the groundbreaking ways nurse researchers have used this intriguing methodology.

THE ROOTS OF PAR

If you are thinking of using PAR in a research project or if you simply want to better appreciate it as a method, it is important to understand the background and evolution of the method. This section offers a snapshot of the philosophical underpinnings and historical roots of PAR. It also attempts to provide a lens into how one might conceptualize and implement a PAR project.
WHY AND WHERE DID PAR ORIGINATE?

Participatory forms of research allow the researcher to include the recipients of the research in the actual process of the research study. PAR is part of the broad category of approaches to participative inquiry that include (a) cooperative inquiry, (b) action science/action inquiry, and (c) PAR (Reason, 1994).

One way to understand PAR is to compare it to more traditional (sometimes called orthodox) forms of research. In the orthodox model of scientific research, the subjects of the research study are passive and have no formal role in the process other than being research subjects. In fact, great care is taken by orthodox researchers to distance themselves from the research subjects to remain as objective as possible and not to introduce bias or otherwise influence the findings of the study. Similarly, members of the community or the organization in which orthodox research is conducted are outside the research process and are not expected or even allowed to have an active role in the research study. Within the logic of orthodox science, this approach is logical and necessary for the research to proceed correctly. It gives the researcher control and authority of every aspect of the research process, and it gives the subject little control or authority. In orthodox research, subjects are fully informed and give consent to be studied, and they may withdraw from the study at any point, but they have little or no control or authority over how the research is conducted and carried out.

On the other hand, PAR finds its roots in a totally different philosophical reality. PAR does not follow the rules or format of orthodox science, and PAR researchers are not required to distance themselves from research subjects. Quite the opposite is true, in fact. PAR researchers are expected to break down the barriers between researcher and subject and to intentionally develop rapport and get to know the people who take part in the study. In participatory forms of research, the research subjects are referred to as participants because they actively participate in the entire process of the study. Orthodox research mandates that researchers distance themselves from research subjects. PAR (and other forms of participatory research) assumes, as Whyte, Greenwood, and Lazars maintain, that science “is not achieved by distancing oneself from the world; as generations of scientists know, the greatest conceptual and methodological challenges come from engagement with the world” (Whyte, Greenwood, & Lazars, 1991, p. 21).

PAR researchers engage in the world first and foremost by giving voice to study participants. Engagement begins when the researcher actively encourages participants from the beginning of the research process to play an
active role. Whether the goal of PAR research is to reduce health disparities (Olshansky et al., 2005), enhance nursing autonomy (Breda et al., 2013), develop practice-based knowledge (Dampier, 2009), or improve care to those experiencing perinatal loss (Pastor-Montero et al., 2012), study participants have an active role in every phase of the research process. This engagement has a benefit to both researchers and participants. It allows researchers to get close to research participants, and it frees researchers from the need to remain distant and detached. At the same time, it allows participants to use their local knowledge about the issue to inform the research process and to increase its meaning and pertinence. In participatory forms of research, the philosophical stance is emancipating for both the researcher and the participant.

Another aspect of PAR is important to note. PAR has an essential and intentional political component. In fact, PAR requires the researcher to focus on the political aspects of producing knowledge (Breda et al., 2013). Not only does PAR acknowledge the role of power, it considers the ways in which knowledge is created. It pays attention to who holds power, how power is gained, who benefits from it, and vicariously, who is harmed or disadvantaged from the lack of power. This intentionally political dimension of PAR is a significant element that separates it from action research (AR).

Why did participatory forms of research emerge and why is it so different from orthodox science? The simple explanation is that researchers and scholars began to think that while orthodox science is important for many research questions and imperative to the development of scientific inquiry, particularly laboratory science, some research questions are not well addressed through orthodox scientific approaches. This different philosophical approach (sometimes called new paradigm science) planted the seeds for many of the qualitative research methodologies we use today and for many of the accompanying theories such as critical theory.

We answered the question why did PAR originate. Now it is time to consider where PAR originated because geographical location and philosophical traditions are intertwined. Location and philosophical traditions inform the method and explain why PAR varies slightly in different locations.

Northern Versus Southern PAR

PAR has two strands: one originated in the South, primarily in South America including Latin America and Brazil (PAR is called investigación-acción participativa, or IAP, in Spanish), and the other originated in the North, primarily in Anglo-North America (Schneider, 2012). The Southern strand
of PAR emerged from a philosophy of critical theory and social action. Brazilian educator and philosopher Paolo Freire and Colombian critical sociologist Orlando Fals Borda are two leading figures in the development of the Southern strand of PAR. These architects of the Southern tradition of PAR sought social transformation and change as an integral part of the process. Southern PAR researchers looked to create projects with peasants, workers, disabled persons, people from ethnic minorities, and others who are oppressed and exploited by political, economic, and class circumstances.

Over time, Fals Borda and his Southern PAR research team in Colombia, South America, attracted international scholars who wanted to learn more about the method. Some of them were anthropologists and sociologists while others came from diverse applied fields. Initially teachers, agronomists, and veterinarians became interested, and later “with the periodic regional and world congresses physicians, dentists, nurses, social economists and engineers approached” (Fals Borda, 2013, p. 158). Still later, historians, humanists, musicians, and even mathematicians were drawn to Southern PAR as a methodology they could embrace. Ethnomathematics, the main concern of which was to “improve teaching schemes to render them less frightening to young people,” was developed as an alternative way to teach mathematics (p. 158).

Simultaneously in Brazil, Paolo Freire developed a PAR project with poor peasants who were unable to read. He developed an alternative educational strategy called educação popular (Portuguese) and educación popular (in Spanish). In English the terms popular education or critical education are used (originally, but no longer translated as “adult education”) to refer to Freire’s view of teaching using alternative teaching formats with the intention of creating a critical awakening as well as new knowledge (Freire, 1996a, 1996b, www.popednews.org). Freire wrote about this form of teaching literacy, calling it “education for critical consciousness.” In writing about this experience, Freire explained that he and participants working with him tried to “design a project in which we would attempt to move from naïveté to a critical attitude at the same time we taught reading” (1996b, p. 42).

The goal of Freire’s literacy project was to work with those who were marginalized and disempowered in society to help them to gain an understanding of their circumstances and to become aware of the need to create social change. Rather than teach them to read using the traditional “banking” method, Freire used PAR to empower the group to help develop a strategy that allowed them to teach each other to read. For example, the peasants were not able to read leases and other legal documents. Prior to learning to read, they could be tricked into signing things they did not understand. Working with the PAR literacy project gave them the ability to read and to
advocate for themselves and others. As a result, in addition to acquiring the knowledge to learn to read, they gained power, awareness, and a critical consciousness (Freire, 1996b).

These Southern PAR pioneers, Orlando Fals Borda and Paolo Freire, were contemporaries—both were born in the 1920s. They viewed PAR as more than a methodology. In their eyes, PAR was part of a movement that included a new way of thinking and doing science. Before doing a PAR study, they believed that researchers had to change their own way of thinking and that it was not possible for strict orthodox researchers to engage in Southern PAR because it requires a critical stance that is philosophically opposed to conventional, orthodox science. In essence, they wanted PAR research to create meaningful change in both the social and cultural contexts as well as in the scientific realm (Fals Borda, 2013).

Fals Borda worked within existing structures of autonomous institutions such as the Rosca Foundation and aligned himself with progressive political parties, while Freire worked within critical movements connected to labor unions of teachers (Fals Borda, 2013, p. 163). Both intellectuals immersed themselves in their communities of interest and took a path of civic resistance rather than militancy. By necessity, Southern PAR is linked to political activism and involvement and to the quest for social justice and societal transformation.

The Northern tradition of PAR developed earlier and in a different way than the Southern strand. Northern PAR is less radical and less political than Southern PAR, and more overlap exists between action research (AR) and PAR in the North. Most reports link psychologist Kurt Lewin to the development of the Northern version of PAR because he was the first to use the term AR. For those interested in the timeline for PAR development, Kurt Lewin (1890–1947) lived and worked before the time of Fals Borda and Paolo Freire.

Kurt Lewin was a pioneer in social and organizational psychology, and he is known, above all, for his change theory. He developed “a practical approach to problem solving through a cycle of planning, action, and reflection” (Schneider, 2012, p. 154). He worked in industrial settings to try to create more democratic workplaces and has influenced the literature on workplace organization and what recently has been called “collaborative improvement processes” (p. 154).

Kurt Lewin had a fascinating career. A Prussian Jew born in 1890, Lewin had a background in social justice and social transformation. His family moved to Germany, where he attended university and studied psychology. He associated with the left-leaning Frankfurt School, was involved in the socialist
movement and in women’s rights. He immigrated to the United States in 1933, the same year that Hitler came to power in Germany. In the United States, he turned his interests to Gestalt psychology, sensitivity training, and later coined the term action research.

Lewin believed that research should have a purpose beyond that of producing scholarly articles and books. For him, research should lead to social action. Focusing on the need to improve intergroup relations, Lewin attempted to understand the role of attitudes and stereotypes as well as the influence social class, politics, and economics had on behavior. Lewin was a social psychologist and as such he was interested in learning how to change social behavior. His three step theory of change (Unfreeze–Change–Refreeze) is known worldwide.

The Northern strand of PAR strives both for advancing human knowledge and improving welfare (Whyte et al., 1991). It includes, among other things, studies in industry and agriculture. One example of PAR in industry is a study of union workers at New York State’s Xerox Corporation, another is a study of the FAGOR group of worker cooperatives in the Basque area of Spain, and a third example is the study of quality circle programs in U.S. companies. An example of PAR in agriculture is a study of third world development and small farmers.

Whether one adheres to the Northern or Southern tradition of PAR, it is important to know when PAR is a good choice to use as a methodology. The next section explores how and when to use PAR, and hopefully this information will help you decide if PAR is a good method to use in a future study.

**HOW AND WHEN TO USE PAR**

If your research problem entails a group of people who are marginalized, exploited, or in some way disempowered, consider using PAR. PAR is appropriate to adopt as a method when issues exist concerning ownership of knowledge and where the need exists “to create communities of people who are capable of continuing the PAR process” (Reason, in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 335). It is a suitable form of research to use in areas where the gap between the rich and poor is great and in marginalized communities where political issues concerning ownership of knowledge are apparent. PAR might be successful when you, as the researcher, are willing to allow the research participants a role “in setting the agendas, participating in the data gathering and analysis, and controlling the use of the outcomes” (p. 329).
With PAR, additional time is needed to get to know the community, to develop rapport, to learn the local norms, to find key informants, and to be sure that research participants are able to involve themselves in a long-term effort. The methodology of PAR can entail the use of either quantitative or qualitative methods or both. This will be determined by the nature of the research problem and the most fitting way to answer the research questions. Peter Reason (1994) points to a variety of activities that can constitute a PAR research project. Reason writes that:

Community meetings and events of various kinds are an important part of PAR, serving to identify issues, to reclaim a sense of community and emphasize the potential for liberation, to make sense of information collected, to reflect on the progress of the project, and to develop the ability of the community to continue the PAR and developmental process. (p. 329)

Activities and interventions, usually not associated with orthodox research, are often a part of the PAR process. Photography, artistic endeavors, poetry, music, theater, performance, dance, role playing, games, team building, workshops, and experiential education are a few ways PAR engages participants. Activities are not chosen haphazardly. The activity is chosen because it fits not only the objective of the research, but also the culture and environment of the participants.

PAR is as much a way of doing research as it is a method of research. It is a philosophy, as well as a research method. It is not doing research on subjects but doing research with participants. PAR participants guide the researcher to discover the research question. Researchers are the experts in academic knowledge, but participants are the “experts” in local knowledge. Academic knowledge and local knowledge are used equally to design a plan. Participants guide researchers with their local knowledge and together they co-create a feasible intervention plan. Reflection and evaluation are also joint activities between researchers and participants. Adult education, also called “popular education,” is often adopted in PAR as a way of learning together. Giving voice to research participants allows PAR researchers to better understand the issues from the participants’ points of view and to develop action-oriented interventions that benefit the community.

Phases of PAR

How to do PAR is more difficult to understand than why to do PAR. The philosophical roots of PAR are clear and well documented in the literature.
However, the steps or phases of the PAR process are less well defined and reported. The iterative process of PAR methodology is the most important feature to keep in mind. This means that the steps or phases of PAR are cyclical and dynamic. It is possible and even desirable to repeat the steps again and again, increasing in complexity and understanding with each cycle.

The processes of establishing rapport, planning, action, reflection, and evaluation are generally considered to be the basic steps of the PAR process. Others break the PAR process into eight phases, adding steps such as goal setting, identification of team members, finding funding, and data analysis. This type of conceptualization is inherently linear with mutually exclusive phases or steps. Consequently, it deters one from thinking in a cyclical or dynamic fashion. Using the conceptualization of establishing rapport, planning, action, reflection, and evaluation serves as a useful guide to both novice and expert researchers. It helps to keep them on track and not to leave out any of the essential components, while allowing for the iterative and cyclical nature of PAR.

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

PAR is a fascinating and powerful methodology to advance practice and science (Whyte et al., 1991). Because it involves the research subjects (called “participants” in the PAR framework) in every step of the research process, it forces researchers to take into account multiple points of view and, particularly, the worldview of the “other.” It turns conventional research methodology on its head, and it challenges us at every corner to rethink our deep-seated bias and preconceptions stemming from the orthodox research process. PAR is a holistic, egalitarian methodology producing results that are relevant, practical, and sustainable. It fits perfectly into nursing and is a good addition to the repertoire of methods used by applied nurse scientists.

PAR is considered new paradigm science. It stems philosophically from a range of critical theories, such as neo-Marxist, post-colonial, and feminist theories. PAR can be loosely divided into a more radical Southern strand and a less radical Northern strand. Southern PAR researchers generally work with disenfranchised and marginalized groups and communities using methods such as participatory popular education (adult education), artistic endeavors, and consciousness building. The goal is for action and social transformation aiming ultimately for social justice and equal rights. Northern PAR researchers generally work in industry and with occupational groups on workplace issues. The assumption is that labor and management
“can work together to create more democratic workplaces” (Schneider, 2012, p. 154). The goal is for action and improved collaborative relationships and enhanced workplace teams.

PAR is best used with exploited and disenfranchised groups of people, where gaps in knowledge and equal rights are large and where the hope for empowerment is the greatest. Understanding the political dimensions of who holds power, how power is exercised, and who is harmed or disadvantaged by power is integral to the PAR process. It is this political dimension that distinguishes PAR from AR.

PAR researchers engage with participants in their local environments and cultures. Target populations for PAR researchers may be groups exposed to alcohol, drugs, domestic violence, and other forms of abuse; groups with disabilities; or groups suffering from ethnic, racial, and class exploitation. Oppressed women, teens, and those with chronic diseases and physical and mental illnesses are also included. Additionally, PAR researchers may choose to work with professionals, semiprofessionals, labor unionists, agricultural workers, undocumented workers, migrant workers, sex workers, persons who are homeless or at risk for homelessness, immigrant groups, and people living in conflict or war zones. This is a partial list of potential target populations for PAR methodology.

The nature of the research problem and the focus of the research help to determine the type of methodology that is suitable. Qualitative or quantitative methods can be used in PAR. Additional time is needed in PAR research to develop rapport and to build community among participants. The steps of the PAR process are generally agreed to be establishing rapport, planning, action, reflection, and evaluation. They are dynamic in nature and are also called iterative, meaning that they are repetitive and cyclical rather than linear in nature.

Participants are considered to be the holders of local knowledge in PAR research. In fact, one of the main goals of PAR is to be useful to the people (Reason, 1994). This is done through activities such as community building meetings, consciousness-raising encounters including but not limited to artistic endeavors, adult/popular education, drama, poetry, workshops, training, and so on. A second goal of PAR is “to empower people at a second and deeper level through the process of constructing and using their own knowledge” (p. 328). Oppressed and exploited groups are often unaware of their own knowledge. They may feel shame and humiliation at their own condition (e.g., mental illness, disability, poverty, substance abuse) and, in this state, they are unable to recognize the value and authenticity of their own local knowledge, know-how, and expertise.
PAR has a strong alternative philosophical foundation that influences it as a research methodology. Research participants become research partners in the PAR process. Doing research with participants is not a good fit for every research scientist, and one should consider this closely prior to engaging in PAR. PAR studies are carried out best by researchers who understand its collaborative and egalitarian elements. Also, research problems that align well with the PAR philosophy are easier to implement and ultimately more successful in accomplishing goals. PAR can be a labor-intensive methodology. Many PAR researchers find it a professionally rewarding method to use, and they choose the method for the humanistic and transformational socio-political rewards it can generate.

In closing, PAR is a dynamic methodology relevant to 21st-century nurses and other applied social scientists. Learning about this fascinating methodology and advocating its appropriate use can help expand both the science and discipline of nursing.

REFERENCES


