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Grey Matters: a guide to collaborative research with seniors

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University of Calgary Press

Marlett, N. & Emes, C. "Grey Matters: a guide to collaborative research with seniors". University of Calgary Press, Calgary, Alberta, 2010.

<http://hdl.handle.net/1880/48236>

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GREY MATTERS

A GUIDE TO COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH WITH SENIORS

Nancy Marlett and Claudia Emes

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A Guide to Collaborative Research with Seniors

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ISBN 978-1-55238-536-4

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Appendix 2

Handout of Basic Principles of PAR

Prepared by Dr. Joan Ryan from *Doing Things the Right Way*

Participatory Action Research is a methodology that has two basic goals. The first is that it is community-based and that it draws participants from that group to actually do the research (after a modicum of training) and, secondly, that the research can enable communities to initiate change. The changes can include different ways of doing things, new forms of communication, education within the community, and also initiatives for policy changes at various government levels (health, education, resources, paring of youth and seniors, etc.).

While each research community can evolve its own criteria and ways of working, some basic principles are the following:

- The community requests that the research be done.

- The community and external resource facilitators/researchers develop consensual research expectations, processes, and outcomes.
- The community establishes a Community Advisory Committee (CAC) or similar body to oversee the project, keep it on track and on budget.
- The research process remains flexible and adaptable within a consistent framework.
- Local researchers receive (comprehensive) training.
- The researchers, resource persons, and CAC work together on evolving the interview guide and informed consent form and on data analysis.
- The interpretive analysis is verified by the whole community.
- The report is written in a language that most community members can understand.
- The report is made available to all interviewees and community members.
- The CAC does an evaluation of the project.
- The community takes steps to implement actions arising from the project and desired by the community.

Key Terms in PAR

Equitable partnerships. The community partners with a resource person or team in ways that ensure the balance of power is equit-

able. There is no “boss.” People build on strengths of each participant, which will vary so that the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts.

Enhancement. Some practitioners call this “empowerment,” which is a term to be avoided since it implies that one party has “power” to give the other. Not so. The PAR process allows each participant to gain new skills and perspectives and thus enhance their own abilities; as well, the group as a whole gains knowledge and capacity.

Community Control. As noted elsewhere, the community (however defined) takes the initiative and maintains control of the research process throughout the project. The results belong to the community, as does the end product.

Different Ways of Knowing. People bring much diversity to any project and there are many ways of knowing. PAR projects respect all ways of knowing and thus many new perspectives can be developed on any given topic or process. People also are diverse in expressing what they know; one may tell a story that seems irrelevant but on reflection carries an important message.

Communication. In PAR projects, communication needs to be continuous so that participants know what is going on, what it means, where the process is taking them, and what actions might flow from the information. Sometimes, “unintended consequences” occur as a result of understanding the communications and these can be quite exciting. Communication also determines what forms can be used when telling others of project results; print materials may be appropriate but so might a video or a play.

Action. Action is the end result of any PAR project. What actions take place and to what end is determined by participants as a result of the research. One of the characteristics of PAR projects is that people begin to see what actions might be reasonable; they sometimes tend to move ahead of the project completion. This makes life exciting but also means that participants may need to back up and reflect a bit.



Marilyn Akazawa

It is really important when you're researching seniors to have seniors do it, because you're looking in a mirror.