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Participatory Action Research and Its Meanings: Vivencia, Praxis, Conscientization

Michael Glassman[1] and Gizem Erdem[2]

Abstract

This article traces the development of the "second" and arguably more well-known "genre" of participatory action research (PAR). The article argues that the origins of PAR are highly distributed and cannot really be traced back to the ideas of a single person or even a single group of researchers. Instead, the development of PAR is tied to social movements of the 20th century, in particular land reform, anticolonialism, and need for a new research methodology, occurring simultaneously across multiple continents. The origins of PAR have little to do with the action research that developed in the United States. For that reason the PAR referent can sometimes be confusing or even misleading. We suggest that the second PAR also be recognized through its mirror concepts of *vivencia, praxis*, and *conscientization*—PAR/VPC. We discuss the core underpinnings of PAR/VPC and its evolution with strong ties to the sociopolitical context of developing societies and their fight for liberation. We also suggest our reflections of future of PAR/VPC with integration of feminist perspectives and inclusion of youth in the education movement.

The genre of participatory action research (PAR) discussed in this article can be seen as emerging through historical and ongoing struggles: the struggle of the oppressed to break free of their oppressors, the struggle of the colonized to escape structures and

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narrow expectations established by those who colonized them, and the struggle of those made invisible or subordinated by more powerful elements in their society to take control of their life trajectories and social and economic destinies. Understanding PAR in many ways involves recognizing how the responses to these struggles helped create new approaches to and understanding of substantive changes over time and across physical, social, and emotional boundaries. In this article we outline the history of PAR as an organic framework for adult education (in its broadest possible sense) that serves the needs of all—as it has emerged and continues to emerge across physical, economic, social, and emotional boundaries. We try to capture the unique qualities of PAR, separating it from similarly named frameworks that developed in the United States a few decades earlier, to recognize PAR for what it has always been—a shared process of discovery that continues to grow through new initiatives such as feminist and youth PAR.

In a seminal presentation Paulo Freire (1982) gave at the Institute of Adult Education in Tanzania, he emphasized how it was critical to reconsider use of language in participatory research, especially in the context of postcolonial countries. While describing analysis of discussion groups in a Tanzanian village, he explained that it was important to have linguists involved while pointing to the participants' use of the word "work." Freire admitted that his initial interpretation of the word "work" was *praxis*. However, he later came to realize that members of the discussion group were using "work" more as a personality trait (e.g., a person is not really suited for work). The same might be said of people who hear or read the referent term, *participatory action research*. We tend to hear the words in the context of our own histories and broadly defined leanings. What makes interpretation even more difficult is that action research (AR) and two completely separate versions of PAR emerged bearing similar names but having different meanings and histories. Kurt Lewin (1946) developed an AR perspective just after World War II as a way of combating prejudice and discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities. William Foote Whyte (1994) developed his version of PAR completely separate from the AR group as a method for examining and recalibrating organizational structure. Both had strong roots in the social and political contexts of the United States in the mid-20th century. AR and Whyte's PAR pushed for democratic participation and civic engagement, but the goal of *action* was to resolve conflict between the majority and the minority in order to maintain the status quo and social order (Glassman, Erdem, & Bartholomew, 2013). Therefore, their research approaches were relatively linear and had centralized lines of development.

On the other hand, the PAR that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in developing societies had a very different character. This second "genre" of PAR was looking to throw off the intellectual, social, and material shackles of colonialism. PAR in these developing societies was situated in the context of oppression by local bureaucracies and imperial powers—and it was more revolutionary as opposed simply reactionary to the existing social order. The evolution of these ideas was decentralized and international with scholars and activists collaborating across various countries, ranging from Tanzania to India, from Brazil to Peru, Chili, and Columbia. Despite the diversity of contexts in which PAR ideas were developing, there were shared sociopolitical and

economic circumstances as opposed to a shared program administered by a core group of researchers. We believe PAR in the developing world evolved through bottom-up processes. It had strong ties with local communities as well as issues involving distribution of wealth and power. The communities and social groups that served as hot house contexts for PAR were striving for new understandings of citizenship, participatory rights, and modes of production.

The attempts to develop new approaches became like spokes in a wheel with new methodologies emerging almost simultaneously targeting new types of problems, not just for these nascent societies but for the world in general. In Tanzania, these ideas were described as *participatory research*, in Brazil and Chile the approach was named *popular research*, in India it became synonymous with initiatives of Gandhi and the poet educator Tagore, and in Columbia it took on the name of *action research*. The different spokes recognized each other relatively quickly thanks in part to the series of important meetings organized by the International Participatory Research Network. The network, with its nonhierarchical and hybrid structure, allowed the different scholars and activists to communicate their ideas easily and collaborate with one another effectively. The referent PAR soon emerged, but as with "work," each of the words has very different meaning and the approach itself has a different trajectory from AR and Whyte's (1994) earlier PAR as they continued to develop in the United States. In the current article, we will solely focus on the second genre of PAR, examining its evolution, premises, and language as shared by many researchers of the developing world.

Distribution and Collaboration

Paulo Freire, Budd Hall, and Early Participatory Research

An early explanation of PAR can be found—at least in part—in an address Freire delivered to the Institute of Adult Education at the University of Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania. Budd Hall had been helping spearhead a program in participatory research, and Freire was invited to present his ideas on his research methodology. This early participatory research was partially inspired by the anti-colonialist policies of the first president of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, and his idea of understanding people as belonging to the land rather than the land belonging to people. There had also been early exploratory work by Marja-Lisa Swantz (1982). She encouraged university students to partner and collaborate with Massai tribal villages to understand their responses to the new economic policies. Swantz had been influenced by the action anthropology of Sol Tax, particularly the Fox project in Iowa (Tax, 1958). Both Hall (1982) and Fals Borda (2006) refer to Swantz's (1982) research in Tanzania as being seminal and critical to development of the approach. If the cycle does start with action, then Swantz's work seems at least as foundational as Freire's writings.

The Institute of Adult Education began to refer to Swantz's (1982) work and similar programs that followed as participatory research (Hall, 1982). Freire's presentation brought the ideas of Adult Education directly into the participatory discussion.

Interestingly, even though at least some of the methodology Freire outlines mirrors Swantz's work, he does not mention Swantz or Hall or refer to possibilities for gender issues in his remarks.

Freire's Address to the Institute of Adult Education

Freire (1970a) was interested in establishing social change through adult education programs that increased autonomous behavior, allowing individuals to break away from the habits of thought developed and maintained by dominant groups through carefully defined everyday activities. Freire believed that education should lead to the recognition that individuals have the ability to choose their activities and transform their own life trajectories. The teaching of literacy is a means and not an end in itself. Literacy should be considered a means for making new and different types of connections with the world, integrating new information and possibilities into everyday action schemes, recreating goals and motivations, and repositioning boundaries.

Freire's (1982) address to the Institute of Adult Education invited the members of his audience into a unique combination of transformation through adult education and prioritizing the experience of individuals in their everyday lives. The address was primarily focused on additions to the methodologies being developed by the Institute of Adult Education as it was grappling with its mission. Freire's argument was that it was counterproductive to treat individuals in rural or urban communities as the sole focus of study, detached from their relationship to the political context of inquiry. Instead, Freire suggested that the only ones who could define these relationships in meaningful ways were the individuals who were actively involved in their ecologies. Accordingly, Freire offered a new slant on the evolving participatory methodology of the researchers of the Institute of Adult Education. After recognizing the problem, the researchers should define a rural/urban area and recruit large samples of individuals from this area and engage them in series of discussion groups. The dialogue between the community members and the researcher/facilitators would provide the data for researchers to analyze from a number of different perspectives.

Two things are apparent in Freire's presentation as central to an emerging participatory approach. The first is that the research process includes ongoing dialogue between the facilitator/researchers and the community members. More important, the process of dialogue is nonhierarchical in nature; all participating partners are equally important as problem solvers, thinkers, and learners. The democratization of research processes opens room for each individual's subjective understanding of various relationships. As Hall (1992) suggests, this is a revolutionary component of participatory research as opposed to conventional academic research, which portrays researchers as experts with knowledge and ultimate problem solvers through their objective research tools. The second key point in Freire's address is that understanding community relationships and social problems requires a rigorous, iterative, and cyclical process of discovery and realization. Researchers need to always be working from the perspective that they may not actually understand what they think they understand. It is important to maintain high levels of participation of the individuals in the research process. For instance, after

the researchers in the Institute of Adult Education complete their analysis, they are not done but are only at the beginning. They bring their findings back to the peasants they have been studying and once again begin to redefine and reunderstand the relationships and how they push and pull actions in specific directions.

Participatory Research

Budd Hall (1982), in his reflections on Freire's presentation and the beginnings of participatory research in Tanzania, suggests that writing about participatory research is difficult because it is based on action at least as much as reflection, and its dynamism is hard to capture in a static report. For Swantz, Hall, and the Institute of Adult Education at Dar-es-Salaam in particular, activism and moving toward social change were inseparable from the research process they were cultivating. In conjunction with President Nyerere's initiatives in Tanzania, Hall's research agenda had a concrete "action" goal. He was focusing primarily on the development of an adult education program, getting urban and rural citizens of a new country to reorient their approach to productive activity, and community. Perhaps nothing captures Hall's (1985) perspective better than one of the underlying principles he presents for participatory research—"Research, learning, and knowledge production are often aspects of the same intellectual processes in the context of action" (p. 292).

While Hall was solidifying an approach to participatory research, similar lines of thinking were emerging in other parts of the world. Francisco Vio Grossi was exploring the idea of popular education as adult education for farmers in Chile. There had been progressively more intensive land reforms over the course of a decade, first through the Chilean president Frei and followed by the land distribution reforms of Marxist president Allende. Land reforms brought different roles to the peasants in their relationship to the land as well as different responsibilities and needs. Those who had worked on the land as subsistence workers had suddenly become landowners, and it became critical to teach the population the intricacies of farming and land use quickly and efficiently. The original attempts at agricultural education by simply importing teaching of farming techniques from the United States turned out to be too narrow, not really dealing with the problems faced by Chilean farmers (Vio Grossi, 1982). Vio Grossi helped initiate a more Freire-inspired agricultural education system. To that aim, Vio Grossi conducted discussions with the farmers, obtained new information on their needs and barriers in their daily lives, and developed education programs through their subjective experiences.

At the same time Vio Grossi was exploring the changing relationships between the Chilean people and the land Orlando Fals Borda was living in Geneva, in exile from Columbia. Fals Borda self-identified as a rural sociologist who specialized in Columbian land reform. He was meeting regularly with five other Columbian researchers, attempting to develop a theoretical outline for the social problems of indigenous peasant populations in Columbia. Freire was also in Geneva at the time and participated in some of the meetings, but again he seemed more additive than foundational to the development of the group's ideas. It was Fals Borda who originally suggested that

the work he was doing in Columbia should be considered *action research*, at least partially in sympathy with Lewin's development of AR. We believe it is interesting that Fals Borda thought his work resembled AR as it was developing in the United States, but we suggest that using Lewin's AR as a referent might have been a mistake, diminishing Fals Borda's own contribution to the approach.

There is another spoke in the wheel for PAR, one less discussed but extremely interesting, from the Indian subcontinent. This wave of participatory research was developing in the late 1960s through the 1970s, stemming from the social movements initially inspired by Gandhi and Tagore. As opposed to the Latin American context of land reform and redistribution of resources through political initiatives, participatory research in India stemmed from issues concerned with British colonialism and its impact on the indigenous populations. That does not necessarily undermine the colonialism aspect of Latin American PAR, but it implies an important difference. Participatory research in Latin America was intertwined with revolutionary changes in the modes of production between local social classes (e.g., Allende's Marxist governmental reforms), whereas in India participatory models were more influenced by civil disobedience and public resistance to the authority of an imperial power. But there were also important similarities. Gandhi lived his "research" in adult education; he committed himself to the full lived experience of the populations that he was attempting to change, helping make the oppressed populations of India aware of the possibilities of change through their relationship to the land and the local culture. Gandhi was not only "understanding" the experiences of the peasants, he was also "sharing" their realities and challenges. Rahman (2006) also illustrates the ways in which Tagore's school was an ongoing experiment in AR that helped set the stage for introduction of a participatory approach in West Bengal. PRIA—Participatory Research in Asia—has been an active and important voice in participatory research from its earliest stages.

Taken together, the development of this second genre of PAR was highly distributed, emerging from the needs and problems of mostly oppressed populations in the everyday world. An initial conference bringing the different spokes together was held in 1977, quickly developing the evolving nodes into a dynamic network of shared ideas and perspectives, locating its hub in India. One of the people who tied these different emerging approaches together was Freire, and we believe that he, in many ways, played the role of an ethereal educational conscience of this network through his developing research methodology. Freire was very good at popularizing and spreading PAR's core ideas and perhaps making them "safe" for a first world audience who did not go through land reform or the pains of colonization. But it is easy to imagine Freire playing a second role, whispering in the ears of Swantz, Hall, Vio Grossi, Fals Border, Rahman, and others, "Remember, it always starts with education—education is the starting point."

Basic Premises of PAR: Vivencia, Praxis, and Conscientization

It is our contention that the PAR that flourished in the 1960s and 1970s in developing countries shared several core premises and characteristics. We believe that understanding

the unique quality of PAR is better captured by presenting the words that we see as co-occurring concepts and processes—*participation/vivencia, action/praxis*, and *research/conscientization*.

Participation/Vivencia

The concept of vivencia is one of the most important, but the least discussed aspects of PAR. Fals Borda took the idea from the Spanish philosopher, Oretagay Gasset (1932/1961), and introduced it into PAR. Gasset's use of vivencia has its origins in Husserl's idea of experience (*erlebnis*), but he expanded the idea by integrating human and surrounding nature as a context for ongoing action. Vivencia can be defined as a full experience of an event with its all possibilities, lived through direct participation. In other words, vivencia cannot be observed; it can only be lived, felt, and experienced.

Although there is no equivalent word in English for vivencia, we believe the concept is closely linked to the idea participation in PAR. For instance, Vio Grossi (1982) emphasized that middle-class university students had minimal impact in rural adult education programs in Chile because they had little idea about the problems the farmers faced. For PAR, either researchers must find ways to participate in the experiences of those they are working with or they must recruit members who live the experience as part of their everyday life to be partners in the research team—or a combination of the two. Swantz, for instance, recruited and trained members of the target community to collect data. Fals Borda actually lived with members of a poverty-stricken river community so that he could "'walk, swim, and row' with them to discover the spirit of their culture" (Rahman, 2008, p. 441). It was during this time that Fals Borda suggested a second concept—*sentipasentes*—feel-thinkers who act through emotions but use cognitive strategies to survive. The research process must include transformative series of vivencia, achieved through participation, sharing, sensing, feeling, and thinking.

Action/Praxis

The transformation of vivencia in PAR to a different collectively defined lived experience happens through action—*praxis*. The general meaning of *praxis* contains elements of dynamism and change, reshaping ideas into actions—it is an act of engaging, exercising, and practicing ideas. We suggest that PAR uses Freire's (1970a; 1973) notion of praxis, defined as "the process of acting upon the conditions one faces in order to change them" (p. 33). Praxis implies a critical reflection, awareness of the process, and its aim. In Freire's pedagogy, praxis refers to the actions taken by the oppressed in the processes of their liberation and path to freedom. Therefore, in PAR, research task begins with some type of action, but in terms of "praxis of the immediate" (Lather, 1986), it must reach beyond abstract ideas about what you (must) do to improve your community and/or what you do to produce material goods, to what you do on a day-to-day basis to survive (echoing the idea of sentipasentes).

Change processes engender inevitable tensions between resistance to changes based in internalized strategies for survival and a developing desire for greater control over one's own life trajectory. Oppressed communities may work toward the point where they seek liberation and freedom, but they have also internalized the values of the oppressive system themselves. When new possibilities are introduced into the local ecology, such as the opportunity for peasants to own land, these possibilities are likely to present challenges created by a mixture of their internalized survival strategies, their acquired new roles in the system, and how they will define their relationship to the land as an "owner." This is complicated by the fact that actions of community members and their survival strategies may be very diverse but also rigid. Some individuals act out of desire and entitlement, whereas others may act to functionally survive in a challenging and shifting ecology. Action as praxis is a fluid, diverse, and confrontational concept that requires constant reflection and dialogue during the change process so that individuals can engage in their own negotiations between their desires and their survival strategies at any given moment. There is no predetermined plan or strategy for such negotiations. The goal of PAR is not to change individual or even collective action trajectories but to give the oppressed members of a community or social group the capabilities of critiquing their own praxis of the immediate. Praxis opens doors for the oppressed masses to criticize, problematize, and claim their condition, which will eventually enable them to overcome it.

Research/Conscientization

Freire (1970a) and Vio Grossi (1982) take the idea of self-initiated and reflective inquiry a step further. They suggest that a tipping point of change for oppressed populations is the time they begin to question and critique actions they may have once believed were critical to their survival. Freire (1970a) refers to this tipping point as *conscientization*, defined as the "process in which men, not as recipients, but as knowing subjects achieve a deepening awareness both of the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform reality" (p. 27). The process of conscientization eventually leads to what Vio Grossi (1981) identified as *disindoctrination*, a recognition that information and skills imposed by the larger social systems serve the function of maintaining the status quo, not necessarily serving benefits of the public.

Both Freire (1970b; 1973) and Vio Grossi (1982) suggest that transformation of the social order cannot be manipulative or hierarchically oriented in any way. Instead, it needs to be horizontal and based on immediate problem solving and concrete goals. The process of conscientization should be closely linked with vivencia—oppressed communities become aware of their "lived experiences" (vivencia), its consequences, and the ways in which they can be challenged. This process is both initiated by and culminates in praxis as the newly empowered population moves on to new action from very different social and personal perspectives. Conscientization is not simply a quick escape from an oppressive community. It is actually about creating new community-based problem-solving processes. Solutions come through the ways in which new perspectives merge with vivencia in the praxis of the immediate.

Taking vivencia, praxis, and conscientization together, PAR offers cycles of inquiries into the critical thinking, reflecting, and actions of members of an oppressed community while it also includes those who entered the community in search of an intervention. It is an exploration of participants in praxis as to why they engage in their own actions and why they conduct them in the ways they do.

We suggest that the genre of PAR discussed in this article is inseparable from vivencia, praxis, and conscientization and that PAR/VPC is a more appropriate acronym to refer to the participatory research in the developing world. We also believe several important premises tie researchers together within the PAR/VPC network. One important shared idea is the significance of adult education initiatives to foster lifelong learning for both individual and community. Here, we see the Freire's influence on the movement with education viewed as the primary mechanism of change for the masses. Education not only should be designed to affect immediate circumstances and needs but must also be wedded to the processes and problems individuals face in order to maintain the interest and commitment of learners. There is a sense of immediacy and the practicality of living life as it comes. There is also a preparing of learners to be ready for what will be required of them in the future that goes along with changing the trajectory of lives and communities in the present. This approach to adult education suggests political implications—when you are preparing a population for future experiences/needs, it is those in charge of education who control the vision of the individual's and community's future. Children are often educated to recreate a society in its own image, whereas oppressed adults must be educated to change their society.

It is also important to note that PAR/VPC introduces new research methodology that reconstructs the roles and value of academic research as well as researchers and participants. Central to PAR/VPC is the idea that you start examination of human action not with an abstract research question but with recognition and observation of human action as it exists. The researchers work with members of the community to understand what occurs in the network of human relationships that either moves it toward or away from desired goals. Using this information, the community members develop a new and better realized plan of action. The goal of research is not hypothesis testing with objective measures but to participate in the realities and experiences of the community and collaborate, learn, and move toward social change in order to improve the human condition. The research process is a cycle of continuous exploration and understanding, an ongoing cycle of *action as praxis, research as conscientization*, and *reflection leading to transformation of praxis*—all within the context of vivencia, lived experience.

Action → Research → Reflection → Action

Praxis focuses on actions taken by individuals in productive activity and the ways in which they restrict possibilities and capabilities for success and control of their life trajectories. The research approach promotes integrated self-reflection that leads to greater self-awareness, conscientization. This self-awareness eventually changes individual's actions. The cycle is continuous with each action serving as a jumping-off point for new

research/reflection. There is no certain end point to the education/intervention process. Each new set of reflections offers not only possibilities for change but also unforeseen problems and difficulties. Any change based on reflection will affect the community as a whole in action, leading to the need for another round of reflection.

Another important premise of PAR/VPC is its critical approach to the issues of "power." PAR/VPC is the voice of the oppressed but not simply of the marginalized. For Freire (1970a), marginalization can often be an illusion because it is often defined by the hegemonic power. Marginalization refers to the *other* in society playing exactly the role they have been assigned to play. This "marginalization" masks oppression as a mechanism that underlies and redefines social class and issues of power. PAR/VPC aims for more structural social change than simply attempting to ameliorate marginalization. It is committed to the idea of changing human condition across generations through education. The focus is on the power relations, not only between the local elite and/or colonizer and the oppressed/colonized but also between oppressed turned oppressor who so often find their own victims.

Interestingly, PAR/VPC researchers (i.e., Hall, 1975, 1992) emphasize how an identical oppressive relationship may also exist between the traditional academic researcher and the participants as "subjects." In the positivist paradigm, participants are acted on by the researchers by being "researched" for data-gathering purposes. Similar to the local elites' role as "landowners," researchers become "data owners." The exploitation of peasants as selling their work to the elite is little different from participants giving information about their lives to the researchers. PAR/VPC is critical of this oppressive relationship where researcher accumulates knowledge as "wealth" and "reputation" with no share or benefit accruing to the participants. Therefore, PAR/VPC is especially committed to the idea of shifting researchers' role from that of "expert" to that of "facilitator" where they participate in the everyday lives of the individuals with whom they are working. That is, PAR/VPC redefines the relationship between researchers and the participants in a nonhierarchical manner. PAR/VPC is committed to merging researcher and participants into unified lived experience that abolishes the illusion of researcher/researched dualism. The research becomes a collective problem-solving process in the shared real world to address dynamic and multifaceted problems (Fals Borda, 2006) incorporating all actors of power relationships, including those involving researchers themselves.

Feminist PAR/VPC and Youth PAR/VPC

Given its highly distributive nature, we have only had the opportunity to touch on some of the roots of PAR/VPC, its basic premises, concepts, and processes. Because PAR/VPC is a forward-looking process, it is important to reflect on the ways PAR/VPC might evolve over time. In particular, we believe that the work of Michelle Fine and other feminist researchers may offer a window into both feminist PAR/VPC and youth PAR/VPC. What Fine and feminism bring to the equation is a better defined and more eloquent conception of the *other*. The other is often developed by the dominant group not only as a way to help them define their own self but also as a powerful rationalization for their

power and privileges over the oppressed group. Not surprisingly, nowhere is this internal definition of the *other* more apparent and as integral to social maintenance than in the way women are defined and treated. Gatenby and Humphries (2000) point out that early PAR/VPC research has been very male oriented and male dominated. This in spite of the fact that one of the seminal PAR researchers, Swantz (2008), has a feminist orientation in her research, with many of her ideas somehow lost in the evolution of the merged PAR framework. Oppression became much more about power relationships between groups than within groups. A feminist orientation in PAR is as much a return to original praxis as an evolution of ideas.

Feminism offers critical perspectives and implications for acknowledging the *other* without attempting to appropriate their experience and understanding of the world back into the dominant discourse. Jopayya and Martin (1996) make the important point that women are often oppressed as part of what we traditionally define as a target community or society. Participatory research is a means for empowering those who have been marginalized within their own social histories—in many ways a way to throw off the yoke of the other that is placed on them by male-dominated bureaucracies, traditions, and expectations. Feminism can expand PAR/VPC in conceptualization and interpretation of power relationships by focusing on this type of internal struggle. Much of early PAR/VPC has focused on oppression of colonized communities. This often led to a focus on the power relationships between culturally and historically defined communities, often with identifiable "national" and/or community boundaries. Feminist perspectives in PAR offers abilities for more nuanced interpretations of oppression as dynamic relationships and perceptions occurring simultaneously across a number of ecological settings. An indigenous population might be oppressed in the society because of caste or color, but other levels of gendered oppressive subsystems might exist within both the oppressor and oppressed communities. These subsystems may be present in the contexts of family, neighborhood, or village. Feminist perspectives can stretch the praxis of PAR across multiple community levels.

One example of feminist PAR project comes from Williams and Lykes's (2003) Photo Voice study. Researchers gave cameras to women of oppressed/endangered communities and asked them to document their everyday lives. The action of photography forced women to step outside of their given roles and reflect on their conditions. The researchers themselves were pulled into the vivencia of women of the community while they were negotiating the use of cameras with the husbands. In that process, all women—both Photo Voice researchers and picture takers—realized that conscientization is not an act or awareness but a long-term negotiation tied to definitions of gender. This is just one example as to how feminist perspectives can help PAR researchers consider power relationships in the form of *matryoshka* (Russian nesting dolls) with different forms and layers of oppression, embedded in larger and more visible social systems.

PAR/VPC and Youth Education

We believe one of the most important new venues for PAR/VPC is exploring conscientization of youth. Given that PAR/VPC has been tied to power relationships in the

means of production, it was originally focused on issues of adult education. However, youth PAR/VPC also offers opportunities in integrating communities into successful education through participatory approaches. PAR may become even more important as youth begin to appropriate new technologies into their learning processes.

We suggest that one way to look at education is to consider the evolution of sensipasentes among youth while they are in the process of being assigned the role of the *other* by the dominant society. Youth are often treated as somehow separate from the processes of change and amelioration of social injustice. Instead, education should be contiguous with adult activities and expectations and a shared community project. As Cammarota and Fine (2008) suggest, it would be beneficial for the community as a whole to create settings for youth where they can share vivencia with the adults in their world in the process of reflection and change. As they grapple with their own sensipasentes, youth should be given opportunities to develop a relationship between their feelings of the moment and the cognitive strategies that are crucial for their survival into adulthood.

The question Cammorota and Fine (2008) raise is how is it possible to engage these youth within their *sensipasentes* without having them blame themselves for their situation. Whereas feminist PAR offers possibilities for examining nested social oppressive systems across settings, youth PAR offers the same possibilities across generations. For instance, youth might be quicker than older adults to recognize their oppression through *conscientization*. However, they may also be alienated from their local society and separated from the adult vivencia. This process can lead to deeper powerlessness of youth, especially when considering negotiation for social change. Cammorota and Fine (2008) point to the dangers of youth falling into an "essentialist trap" (p. 4) where they blame themselves for their plight.

Given the generational oppression, youth may be one of the most important populations for PAR/VPC. Hall (1981) suggests that "giving voice" and "the right to speak" (p. 22) is central to the participatory research framework. Similarly, marginalized youth such as those experiencing homelessness, severe mental illness, or substance abuse issues consistently report feelings of being unheard and invisible (e.g., Harter, Berquist, Scott Titsworth, Novak, & Brokaw, 2005). In addition, youth unemployment has become a global problem in the past decade. The World Economic Forum (2013) gives an estimate of 1.2 billion unemployed youth, aged 15 to 24 years, in the world, composing 17% of the world's population and 40% of the world's unemployed. We suggest that PAR can help alleviate some of the alienation youth feel from their own society and enable them to become part of social policy and change to resolve the local and global issues they face. Emerging technologies may offer tools and venues for youth to share, discuss, and solve their problems in both local and global contexts. We believe that integrating PAR framework in research will provide rich opportunities for change in the lives of youth.

Our Own Journey to and Through PAR/VPC

The development of a framework for PAR/VPC has been an interesting journey for us and one that is uniquely tied to the Internet—it is where the first thought that led to the

writing of this article originated, and it serves as the jumping-off point for future considerations. PAR/VPC may have important implications for how we understand human–Internet activity, some of which may already be apparent through nascent social movements around the world. We will discuss the important role PAR/VPC may play in our understanding of human activity in the Internet age later in this section.

In spite of what we now see as obvious connections between PAR/VPC and Internet-driven challenges to everyday praxis, we did not initially look to the work of Budd Hall, Fals Borda, or the other extraordinary, dynamic thinkers discussed in this article. A few years ago, we would have been hard-pressed to recognize their names or their contributions. Our initial forays into AR focused on the work of Kurt Lewin and Chris Argyris as a framework for understanding the ways in which the Internet might change education (Glassman, Bartholomew, & Hur, 2013)—in particular the socially prescribed, often linear, relationships between the teacher and the taught. We believed it was important to move beyond more traditional approaches of knowledge building because the Internet is challenging not only our perceptions of the world but the ways in which we think at a very basic level (Glassman, 2012a). As part of the initial project we did a historical exegesis of AR (Glassman, Erdem, & Bartholomew, 2013), something we were surprised to find had not been done before. We were also surprised to find that there were three qualitatively different genres using the referent AR: the work of Lewin and his student Lippitt, the PAR suggested by the work of William Foote Whyte, and the PAR examined in this article. We included all three in the initial version of the AR paper, but at least two reviewers suggested we break off what has been referred to as Southern or emancipatory PAR into its own paper.

One of the most interesting experiences in attempting to differentiate the three genres of AR, especially PAR/VPC from Whyte's PAR, which we believed was critical, is the ways in which different people we talked to and read used different referents. We were not satisfied with Southern PAR because it limits its point of origin to the Southern hemisphere, potentially losing the central roles played by African and Asian regions. We were not satisfied with emancipatory because a strong argument can be made that Lewin's AR was also emancipatory. The need to find some meaningful way to differentiate the PAR of Hall, Fals Borda, and Vio Grossi became a dominant theme in our thinking as we moved forward.

An important suggestion from the reviewers to the original AR paper and one that helped shape this article was to look at some of the writings of Budd Hall and the participatory research developed at the University of Dar-es-Salaam. Hall had already done interesting writing on the beginnings of PAR, which we were able to use as one of the bases for this article. One of the major differences was that although especially Whyte's PAR could be traced back to a single source, the origins of PAR/VPC were highly distributed. The distributed, nonhierarchical, nonlinear development of PAR/VPC ideas seemed to not only mirror but also actually anticipate the Internet—and we began delving deeper into the idea of what one of us later defined as an Open Source project (Glassman, 2013). The Internet also seemed sympathetic to the aspirations of theorists such as Hall and Fals Borda by offering new possibilities for voice for the oppressed that is integrated into their everyday lives, and new channels of

communication for challenging praxis at a very basic level. To give just one example, the sharing of photographs of protests on Twitter echoes Freire's (1970a) of using photographs to challenge everyday conceptions of the oppressed.

The writing of this article emerged out of a combination of vivencia, praxis, and conscientization: vivencia because it fit into the life we were living as we engaged the Internet age—we were able to recognize popular movements across the globe, some of which had a direct impact on our lives, and the ways the Internet potentially merged with PAR/VPC as a natural course of events (Glassman, 2012b); praxis because as we went deeper into the origins and trajectories of PAR/VPC, we became more aware of our own biases and confusion in how we approach different issues in our lives as academicians and citizens; and conscientization because through writing this article we began to recognize that we accepted social prescribed praxis in teaching and research that did not hold up under the scrutiny of reflection. The writing of this article became an ongoing reflection on our own praxis, an educational process that helps us reach beyond predefined boundaries set by our lives.

Conclusion Where There Is No Conclusion

It seems odd to write a conclusion section for PAR/VPC when one of its attributes is that there really are no conclusions given its cyclical and dynamic nature. PAR/VPC is different from mainstream academia in its premises, methodology, and history. The research process is political, nonhierchical, and recurring. Contrary to the goal of traditional research as hypotheses testing, PAR/VPC moves toward problem solving *with* the community. Although PAR/VPC does share some qualities with Lewin's AR and Whyte's PAR, we believe it is not really helpful to consider them under the same umbrella. PAR/VPC emerged through anticolonialist, often Marxist economic policies, sweeping through Africa, India, and especially South America. The roots of PAR/VPC can be traced back much further, including the anti-colonialization initiatives of Gandhi and Tagore in India (Rahman, 2006). There is little doubt that versions of Marxism play a key role in the continuing development of the approach. But it is also clear that one of the primary goals of PAR/VPC is for all members of the community (interventionists and participants) to let go of their ideologies and embrace problems in the context of vivencia—the lived experience of those attempting to transform. It is not any preconceived ideas that lead to this transformation but education that engenders an action, research, and reflection cycle.

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