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.