PH 219C
Participatory Action Research in Public Health
Spring 2002

Instructors: Meredith Minkler
Units: 2-3*
When offered: Thursdays 10-12
Location: 2301 Tolman
CC# 76797

Participants: Enrollment limited to 25 doctoral and advanced master’s degree students in the Schools of Public Health and Social Welfare. Other students to be admitted pending space availability.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) and related methodologies have received growing attention in fields like public health over the past several decades. Defined as "systematic investigation, with the collaboration of those affected by the issue being studied, for the purposes of education and taking action or effecting social change," PAR is not a research method but an approach to research partnerships and applications. It has roots in popular education in Third World nations of Asia and Africa, and has been applied in the US, Canada and elsewhere in disciplines including social psychology, anthropology, and adult education. Participatory research approaches including PAR have been effectively employed in action-oriented studies of work and health, the prevention of alcohol and other drug related problems, youth issues, homelessness, HIV/AIDS prevention and other areas.

Purpose and Structure of the Seminar

The goal of this seminar is to provide doctoral and advanced masters degree students with an understanding of theories, principles and strategies of PAR, an appreciation of advantages and limitations of this approach and skills necessary for participating effectively in community based PAR projects. The class will meet once a week for two hours. Although some lectures will be presented, the course’s primary format will reflect PAR’s philosophical commitment to co-teaching and co-learning as opposed to more didactic pedagogical approaches, and critical group discussion will be emphasized. Case studies of PAR projects will be presented to complement and illustrate academic discussions of principles, issues and challenges raised.

Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

• Identify three theoretical perspectives that have shaped the development and evolution of community based PAR and describe the contributions of each.

*Third unit for Academic Service-Learning component only.
List and describe at least four major principles of PAR and illustrate their relevance with case study data.

- Identify and analyze race, gender and class dimensions of participatory research.
- Identify and discuss three means of addressing validity and rigor issues in PAR.
- Describe the spectrum of what gets labeled participatory research in public health and related contexts.
- Describe four to five stages in an empowering participatory approach to evaluation and how each compares and contrasts with steps in traditional evaluation research.
- Identify three advantages and three limitations of community based PAR as a method for approaching study and action to address public health problems.

Readings

Reader is available at Copy Central, Shattuck Square and University (tel. 848-7034).

Assignments and Grading

In keeping with the philosophical orientation of the course, a heavy accent will be placed on high quality class participation, with all students regularly engaged in critiquing readings and in other ways contributing to group learning experience.

Class members who are concurrently engaged in the conduct and/or planning of PAR additionally will be asked to share their experiences and insights to facilitate group learning. Class participation will account for 25% of the final course grade.

Midterm

Students each will read and critically review a community-based participatory research case study provided by the instructor, discussing (1) ways in which it met or failed to meet PAR principles, (2) how utilization or non-utilization of these principles influenced project processes and outcomes, and (3) how validity and other methodological issues were addressed or not addressed. Each paper will end by providing at least 3 methodological, ethical, or other research related lessons from the field gleaned through the case study. Papers should be 8–10 pages in length, excluding references, and will be due during the 7th week of class (March 7th).

Final Project

The final project, due on May 2nd, may take 1 of 3 forms:

1. Prepare a 12-15 page paper (excluding references) describing and analyzing some aspect of PAR (or an actual PAR project) with which you wish to achieve greater familiarity. The paper may draw on literature reviews, interviews with key informants, etc., and should be analytical in nature.
2. Students currently engaged in a PAR project may submit an analytical field notebook in which they utilize concepts and readings from class to critically evaluate the project and study day-to-day issues arising in the course of implementation. New opportunities for involvement in a start up or ongoing community based PAR project also may be available for students choosing option #2.

3. Develop a retrospective analysis carefully critiquing a community-based PAR project in which you were involved, integrating relevant literature and concepts from class.

Session Outline

January 24

Introduction


January 31

PAR in Context: Historical and Theoretical Framework and Underlying Values, Assumptions and Principles


Recommended:


February 7

PAR in the context of alternative participatory research strategies


February 14

Case Studies of PAR for Health.

Guest: Pam Tau Lee, Labor and Occupational Health Center (LOHP): PAR and Immigrant Hotel Workers


February 21

Initiating and maintaining effective relationships with communities: Role(s) of the community and the "outside" researcher (Part I)


**February 28**

Initiating and maintaining effective relationships with communities: role(s) of the "outside" researcher (Part II)


**March 7 MIDTERMS DUE**

Selecting issues and conducting issue analysis with communities Photovoice case study

Guests: Cheri Pies and Maggie Gaddis, Contra Costa County MCH Division

Minkler M. and Hancock T. Community-driven identification and issue selection: Overview, illustrative approaches and considerations for practice. In M. Minkler and N. Wallerstein. (Eds.) Community Based Participatory Research for Health (in press).


Recommended:


March 14

Using PAR in quantitative research: case studies from the environmental justice movement


March 21

PAR with hidden populations.
Case study: The Transgender Community Health Study

Guests: Kristen Clements, DrPH, and others. AIDS Office, San Francisco Health Department.

Clements K. Working with hidden populations: Participatory research methods of the San Francisco Transgender Health Study. In M. Minkler and N. Wallerstein. (Eds.) Community Based Participatory Research for Health (in press).


Recommended:


March 28-- NO CLASS--Spring Break
April 4

Issues of power and empowerment in participatory evaluation
Guest: Lyn Paleo, Evaluation Consultant and DrPH Student


Wallerstein N. Power Between Evaluator and Community: research relationships within New Mexico's healthier communities. Social Science and Medicine 49 (1999) 39-53

Recommended:

Students who have not taken Community Organizing should additionally read:

Coombe C. Using Empowerment Evaluation in Community Organizing and Community-Based Health Initiatives, Chapters 18, pp 291-307 and

Roe K et al. Community Building through Empowerment Evaluation: A Case Study of HIV Prevention Community Planning, Chapter 19, pp 3028-322
Both in Minkler M (Ed.) Community Organizing and Community Building for Health. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers U Press, 1997 (on reserve in public health library)

April 11

PAR in International Settings


April 18

Issues of research quality and rigor in participatory research


April 25

Getting to Action: PAR and Social Change

Themba M and Minkler M. Getting to action: Influencing Policy Change Through Community Based Participatory Research. In M. Minkler and N. Wallerstein. (Eds.) *Community Based Participatory Research for Health* (in press)


May 2

Conclusion
