

Tel Aviv University
Bob Shapell School of Social Work

Participatory Action Research: Theories, Principles and Methods
Syllabus

Instructor: Mary L. Ohmer, PhD, MSW, MPIA

Associate Professor and Chair, Community,
Organization and Social Action Specialization
University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work

Course Description

Students will learn about and apply theories, principles and methods of applied action research with communities and community partners, as well as how participatory action research is used in community work to address critical issues and social needs. Students will learn about the ways in which participatory action and community based participatory research methods promote collaboration and action-oriented results. The course will focus on ways to engage community members in the design, implementation and use of research to build individual, organizational, and community capacity and further social justice.

Course Objectives

- Learn about the continuum of community and participatory research from individual investigator driven to community driven research.
- Understand the philosophical foundation of participatory action research, including the role of power and relationships.
- Understand and analyze how identity, culture, and social location intersect with the participatory research process, including the positionality of the researcher.
- Understand and critically analyze theoretical and conceptual frameworks that inform participatory action and community based participatory research.
- Identify and apply ethical guidelines, core principles and steps of participatory action and community based participatory research.
- Understand how to enter, build partnerships, and work collaboratively with individuals, organizations and communities to conduct research that is of mutual benefit.
- Analyze and identify potential strategies for addressing the challenges of community and participatory action research, including the time-intensive nature of the work, funding constraints, and the depth of engagement required with the population involved. It might be helpful to address these challenges explicitly in the course, along with possible strategies for navigating them.
- Understand how to engage in youth participatory action research, intergenerational action research and action research around multiple social and community issues.
- Understand and analyze participatory action methodologies, practices and technical approaches to inquiry, including qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods (e.g., focus groups, interviews, surveys, case studies, observation, historical analysis, etc.)
- Discuss and analyze strategies for disseminating and translating research findings into actionable strategies, including ways to promote data justice.

Teaching Methodology

The course will use a lecture/group dialogue format, and hands-on application of research principles and methods, including case studies, small group discussions and role plays. The instructor will share and discuss case studies, including examples from her own collaborative community based participatory research on equity, equitable development, and youth and community violence prevention. Students will engage with a community partner to apply what they are learning through the class and to discuss ways that participatory action and community-based research can benefit the community and how to respectfully and genuinely engage with residents and community organizations.

It is strongly recommended that students reach out to a service provider they are already in contact with through their current professional work. The initial outreach, simply to ask for the provider's consent to have a conversation about a possible research question for PAR, should be made **before the course begins**. The service provider is not expected to take part in writing the proposal, only to agree to reflect together with the student on a relevant research direction.

During the first class, students will present their initial ideas for potential partnerships, discuss them with their peers, and select the community partner with whom they will move forward in developing their research proposal.

Students may work in small groups of 2–3, if they wish to collaborate on the project. Students will also be engaged in discussing their own experiences with research.

Assignments: Research Proposal

Students will work together in groups of 2-3 to reach out to a service provider/community they're interested in and ask what they'd like to learn through research, including identifying a research question or series of research questions that would help the provider better understand the work they do in the community.

Afterwards, students will continue working in their small groups to develop a research proposal to address the research question(s)/interests of the service provider/community partner. Students may continue to engage the service provider/community partner in the next steps of this assignment, but it is not a requirement.

The research proposal will consist of a description of the service provider/community partner that students reached out and a description of the community they serve. The proposal will also include a review of the literature related to the research question(s) and topic, a research outline, a description of potential participatory action/community-based research partnership process and methods and potential challenges and ways to address them. Students will present their Research Proposal on the last day of class. In addition, students will complete a self-reflection on their experiences with this project and what they learned about PAR/CBPR.

- Research Question (10%)
- Research Proposal (75%)
 - Description of service provider/community partner and the community they serve (15%)
 - Literature Review (20%)
 - Research Outline, including process and methods (25%)
 - Potential challenges and ways to address them (15%)

- Self-Reflection (15%)
- An in-class presentation of the research proposal will be awarded up to 10 bonus points

Required Readings

Required journal articles, book chapters and other documents are listed below. Please read the required readings prior to each class.

Day One

Overview and Key Concepts

- Welcome and Introductions
- Course Purpose, Outline and Assignments
- Key Concepts for Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR)

Foundations for PAR/CBPR

- Foundations and principles for PAR and CBPR: The role of power and relationships
- The research continuum: individual investigator to community driven research
- Factors impacting PAR/CBPR (e.g., identity, culture, social location, positionality)

Application – Working with A Community Partner

- Getting to Know your Community Partner/Service Provider
 - Gathering information on potential Community Partners: mission, programs, values and geographic location and service area
 - Service Providers/Community Partner Research interests and goals
- Engaging with Service Providers/Community Partners you are interested in
 - Small Group Activity: Strategies for engaging with a service provider/community partner to identify their research interests.
 - Large Group Activity: Sharing and Discussion

Readings prior to the first class

- Branom, C. (2012). Community-based participatory research as a social work research and intervention approach. *Journal of community practice*, 20(3), 260-273. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08861099241288230>
- Baum, F., MacDougall, C., & Smith, D (2006). Participatory action research. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, 60(10), 854-7. <https://doi.org/10.1136/jech.2004.028662>
- Israel, B. A., Schulz, A. J., Parker, E. A., & Becker, A. B. (1998). Review of community-based research: assessing partnership approaches to improve public health. *Annual review of public health*, 19(1), 173-202. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.publhealth.19.1.173> (Read pages 173-181)

- Muhammad, M., Wallerstein, N., Sussman, A. L., Avila, M., Belone, L., & Duran, B. (2015). Reflections on Researcher Identity and Power: The Impact of Positionality on Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) Processes and Outcomes. *Critical sociology*, 41(7-8). <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4943756/>
- Ohmer, M.L., Brisson, D. & Foster, K., Hyde, C. & Ivery, J. (2023). Collaborations in community-engaged research: paving the way for the future of social work research [Special Issue]. *Journal of Community Practice*, 31(3-4), 255–265. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2023.2287937>

Day Two

Theories and Frameworks for PAR/CBPR

- Paulo Freire's influence on PAR: Critical and liberatory praxis
- W.E.B. DuBois' influence on community engaged/participatory research in the U.S.
- CBPR Frameworks in public health in the U.S.

PAR/CBPR Researcher and Community Partner Roles

- Roles of the Researcher: Conducting research on, in and with the community
- Community Partner Roles and Readiness
- Group Activity: Practice Research Roles and Engagement with Partners

PAR/CBPR Stages

- Stage One: Community Engagement and Analysis
- Stage Two: Research Design, Roles and Responsibilities
- Stage Three: Analysis, Interpretation and Dissemination

Application – Research Proposal

- Large Group: Student share information from their conversations with Service Providers
- Small groups: Work on Research Proposal: Literature Review and Research Goals
- Large Group: Report back on progress and questions

Readings prior to Day Two of Class

- Andrews, J. O., Newman, S. D., Meadows, O., Cox, M. J., & Bunting, S. (2012). Partnership readiness for community-based participatory research. *Health education research*, 27(4), 555–571. <https://doi.org/10.1093/her/cyq050>
- Campos, F.C. & Anderson, G.L. (2022). Paulo Freire's Influence on Participatory Action Research. In Burns, D., Howard, J., & Ospina, S. (Eds.). *The sage handbook of participatory*

research and inquiry (Vol. 1). SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529769432>

- D'Alonzo, K. T. (2010). Getting started in CBPR: lessons in building community partnerships for new researchers. *Nursing inquiry*, 17(4), 17(4), 282–288. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1440-1800.2010.00510.x>
- Ohmer, M.L., Sobek, J.B., Teixeira, S.N., Wallace, J.M., & Shapiro, V.L. (2012). Community-based research: Rationale, methods, roles and considerations for community practice. In Weil, M., Reisch, M., & Ohmer, M.L. (editors). *The Handbook of Community Practice*, 2nd edition. (pp. 791-807). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. (Note: We will cover methods on day 3 of class)
- Stuart, P. H. (2023). The Philadelphia Negro: community-university research collaboration in the 1890s. *Journal of Community Practice*, 31(3–4), 266–283. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2023.2282216>

Day Three

PAR/CBPR Challenges and Facilitating Factors

- Partnership Related Issues
- Methodological Issues
- Broader Social, Political, Economic, Institutional, and Cultural Issues
- Role of Self in transformative research

PAR/CBPR Methods

- Anti-oppressive research praxis in PAR
- Diversity of Methods in PAR/CBPR
- Case Studies: Small Group Activity

Application – Research Proposal

- Small Groups: Work on Research Proposal: Research Process and Methods
- Large Group: Report back on progress and questions

Readings prior to Day 3 of Class

- Bradbury, H. (2022). Action research – participative self in transformative action. In Burns, D., Howard, J., & Ospina, S. (Eds.). *The sage handbook of participatory research and inquiry (Vol. 1)*. SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529769432>
- Gutierrez, R. A. E., Sonsteng-Person, M., King-Shaw, S., & Valmocena, M. T. (2023). For the institution or for the community? Toward an anti-oppressive research praxis in conducting participatory action research. *Journal of Community Practice*, 31(3–4), 284–296. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2023.2272162>

- Israel, B. A., Schulz, A. J., Parker, E. A., & Becker, A. B. (1998). Review of community-based research: assessing partnership approaches to improve public health. *Annual review of public health*, 19(1), 173-202. (Read pages 182-202)
- Ohmer, M.L., & Owens, J. (2013). Using photovoice to empower youth and adults to prevent crime. *Journal of Community Practice*, 21(4), 410-433.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2013.842196>
- Wallerstein, N. B., & Duran, B. (2006). Using community-based participatory research to address health disparities. *Health promotion practice*, 7(3), 312-323.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839906289376>

Day Four

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)

- The role of power and power dynamics
- Case Examples: Small Group Activity

PAR/CBPR Community Partnerships: Measuring Success

- Indicators and measures of success in long-standing CBPR partnerships
- The MAPs (Measurement Approaches to Partnership Success) Study
 - Theory and methods
 - Results: Benefits and Costs of long-standing CBPR partnerships
 - University of Pittsburgh: Experience participating in this study

Application – Research Proposal

- Small Groups: Research Proposal: Challenges and Solutions and Preparation for Presentations on Day Five
- Large Group: Report back on progress and questions

Please read the following articles prior to Day 4 of Class

- Brush, B. L., Mentz, G., Jensen, M., Jacobs, B., Saylor, K. M., Rowe, Z., Israel, B. A., & Lachance, L. (2020). Success in Long-Standing Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) Partnerships: A Scoping Literature Review. *Health education & behavior: The official publication of the Society for Public Health Education*, 47(4), 556–568. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1090198119882989>
- Israel, B. A., Lachance, L., Coombe, C. M., Lee, S. D., Jensen, M., Wilson-Powers, E., Mentz, G., Muhammad, M., Rowe, Z., Reyes, A. G., & Brush, B. L. (2020). Measurement Approaches to Partnership Success: Theory and Methods for Measuring Success in Long-Standing Community-Based Participatory Research Partnerships. *Progress in community health partnerships: Research, education, and action*, 14(1), 129–140.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/cpr.2020.0015>

- Lachance, L., Coombe, C. M., Brush, B. L., Lee, S. D., Jensen, M., Taffe, B., Bhardwaj, P., Muhammad, M., Wilson-Powers, E., Rowe, Z., Caldwell, C. H., & Israel, B. A. (2022). Understanding the Benefit-Cost Relationship in Long-standing Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) Partnerships: Findings from the Measurement Approaches to Partnership Success (MAPS) Study. *The Journal of applied behavioral science*, 58(3), 513–536. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021886320972193>
- Teixeira, S. (2016). Beyond broken windows: Youth perspectives on housing abandonment and its impact on individual and community well-being. *Child Indicators Research*, 9(3), 581-607. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12187-015-9327-1>
- Wagaman, M. A., Howell, K., Teresa, B., Hefner, R., Woehrle, H., Haynes, T. S., & Lawrence, J. (2023). Youth participatory action research as an empowerment-based method for community change. *Journal of Community Practice*, 31(3–4), 297–314. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2023.2283446>
- Young, A., Toraif, N., Le, C., Gergen Barnett, K., & Augsberger, A. (2024). Facing power: navigating power dynamics in a youth participatory action research project situated within a healthcare setting. *Journal of Community Practice*, 32(3), 315–336. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2024.2385624>

Day Five

PAR/CBPR methods for dissemination and action

- Building community capacity
- Improving community outcomes
- Research translation for policy and practice
- Research dissemination and data justice

Application – Research Proposals

- Student Presentations of Research Proposals
 - Feedback and Discussion: Strategies for Application

Student Reflections and Key Takeaways

- What are the take aways from what you learned in the class
- What are some of the key challenges and potential solutions for PAR/CBPR
- How could you apply or utilize what you’ve learned: as students, as potential social work researchers or as potential community research partners?

Readings prior to Day 5 of Class

- Cashman, S. B., Adeky, S., Allen III, A. J., Corburn, J., Israel, B. A., Montaña, J., ... & Eng, E. (2008). The power and the promise: Working with communities to analyze data, interpret findings, and get to outcomes. *American Journal of Public Health*, 98(8), 1407-1417. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2007.113571>
- Izumi, B. T., Schulz, A. J., Israel, B. A., Reyes, A. G., Martin, J., Lichtenstein, R. L., ... & Sand, S. L. (2010). The one-pager: A practical policy advocacy tool for translating community-based participatory research into action. *Progress in community health partnerships: research, education, and action*, 4(2), 141. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cpr.0.0114>
- Ohmer, M.L., Neumann, A., Jacobs, L., Beery, J., DeMars, K., & Miller, E. (in production). Advancing Data Justice: Lessons from a Collective Efficacy Violence Prevention Intervention. *Journal of Society for Social Work and Research, Special Issue: Research Methods to Elevate the Study of Race and Antiracism in Social Work*.
- Wallerstein, N. & Duran, B. (2010). Community-based participatory research contributions to intervention research: The intersection of science and practice to improve health equity. *American journal of public health*, 100(S1), S40-S46. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2009.184036>