

5-5-2009

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EXPLORING THE MEANING OF
POWER AND VOICE THROUGH A
PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT
CONDUCTED BY A DOCTORAL STUDENT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2009

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This dissertation explored the meaning of power and voice through a participatory action research (PAR) project. The setting for the research was an Early Head Start program located in rural Western Pennsylvania.

In this dissertation I explored whether and in what ways the principles of PAR contributed to impacting the strength of local voice in relevant dialogue and how those who participated in the PAR project perceived that their voice made a contribution. I also addressed the interconnections and tensions that emerged between PAR and the IRB as I experienced them through this dissertation. Critical issues explored included the dynamics of power in relationships along with structural and institutional forces that emerged in the course of this dissertation.

The research approach for this dissertation was qualitative inquiry using ethnography to observe a PAR project that equitably involved all partners in the research process. Qualitative data collected throughout the duration of this PAR project provided rich insights into the co-researchers efforts to strengthen their voice within their own program and community.

The findings are presented in two sections. The first section presents three local constituent groups perspectives of their voice in Early Head Start prior to the initiation of the PAR project. The second section presents their experiences of the project, reflections on voice, any changes perceived and perspectives on what aspects of the PAR project contributed to their experiences. Each constituent group demonstrates distinct and different perspectives that impacted this study.

The findings from this PAR research suggest that the principles of PAR, as implemented in this project, contributed to strengthening the voices of co-researchers during this process. The analysis also highlights the limitations of this PAR project when all stakeholders were not at the table due to ethical differences between traditional research requirements of the IRB and the collaborative approach of PAR.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many individuals who have been there to inspire and support me along this journey in my life. First, I want to thank my mother, Anna Marie Acklin, for her gift of perseverance. The sacrifices she made raising six children, along with her determination and “never give up” attitude provided the foundation I needed to “keep going” when it would have been much easier to say, “well, I tried to get a Ph.D.” Thanks, Mom!

I would like to express my gratitude to my gifted committee members, Dr. Alex Heckert, Dr. Robert Ackerman, and Dr. Betsy Crane for providing me the guidance, education, and encouragement needed to succeed in this endeavor, both in and out of the classroom setting. They were, and continue to be, talented and inspiring role models for me throughout my time at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

The minute I met Dr. Susan Boser, my dissertation chairperson, I knew that this was not going to be an easy, quick, or boring journey. I could not have asked for a more talented individual to guide me, direct me, and inspire me throughout this most challenging academic experience. While she validated the challenges I experienced along the way, she also believed that I had the strength and abilities needed to overcome them and finish this dissertation. She painstakingly read every word I wrote, draft after re-draft, after re-draft. Dr. Boser continuously pushed me to think and write more deeply, pushed further, and would not take “it’s good enough” as an excuse.

I want to thank Community Services of Venango County, Inc., Governing Board of Directors, for their willingness to give me the flexibility in my work to pursue this doctorate degree. Their confidence in my abilities not only as a doctoral student but as Executive Director of their agency gave me much needed confidence in my leadership abilities during trying times.

There were many Cohort Two classmates who also provided encouragement, support, and memories as we strived to become academic researchers, especially Dr. Mike Koseck and Dr. Jennifer Olson-Marchinko. Both provided many opportunities for reflection and enjoyment of the journey. The time spent getting to experience Jennifer's smile, wit, intelligence, and love of her family will remain in my heart forever.

I also want to express my love and appreciation to my husband, Ray, and to our four wonderful children, Christopher, Matthew, Elizabeth, and Kathleen, for their sacrifices made, especially the enormous amount of time this work took away from our family life. It did not go unnoticed and was something that I thought of constantly. I also know that you are all proud of my accomplishment. I hope my experience has given all of you the strength to pursue your dreams throughout your lifetime. While my granddaughter Lexi was beside me from the beginning, I also was fortunate to have my youngest granddaughter, Luna Mary, on my lap, sharing her books with me in San Francisco, as I put the finishing touches to Chapter Seven, hit the last "send" button and finally went off to play!

And lastly, my most profound gratitude and appreciation to the four amazing Early Head Start mothers, my co-researchers, who willing gave of their

time, talents, and expertise to make this dissertation happen. I learned so much from all of you, and am honored to have shared this experience with you.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my beautiful granddaughter, Lexi Feroz, my Angel-Belle. You were a joy to have at my side as I wrote this dissertation, constantly reminding me what was most important in my life.

Happy seventh birthday!

Love,

Dr. Grandma

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CHAPTER ONE

FOCUS AND FRAMING

Introduction

This dissertation explores the meaning of power and voice through a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project. The setting for this research is in an Early Head Start program situated in rural Western Pennsylvania. My study was to explore the process of how PAR worked to increase the strength of the local voice of Early Head Start parents, Early Head Start practitioners, and community stakeholders in cycles of relevant dialogue during the development of a PAR project. The project's goal was to design a measurement tool that would identify and measure long-term outcomes for Early Head Start. Key stakeholders would work collaboratively in a manner that was meaningful to them.

Significance of Participatory Action Research Approach

PAR, rooted in the work of Paulo Freire (1970), is about working with local people to solve problems and investigating local issues with the intention of enacting changes. This process of investigation, change, and hopefully transformation is based in dialogue.

The role of PAR is to empower people through the construction of their own knowledge, in a process of action and reflection. Friere (1970) describes this process as "conscientization" which involves becoming aware of limits created by others and taking practical actions that result in changed conditions. Selener (1997) discusses that such action against power over relations implies

conflict in which the power of the dominant classes is challenged, as the relatively powerless begin to develop their new awareness of their reality, and to act for themselves. I represent the research practice of PAR in this dissertation as a research modality that engages in efforts toward change and transformation.

Perspective on Traditional Research Approaches

Traditional research approaches were not appropriate to use with this dissertation because they are typically conducted in a manner that separates the researcher from the researched and seek to generate knowledge about people without their voice in the process. Distance from the setting and people involved are maintained, leading to a lack of engagement with the social problems under study. Conventional research effectively excludes power and decision-making authority from those being researched and closes people out of participation in dialogue contributing to solutions to their own life problems.

Greenwood and Levin (2005) discuss how the conventional understanding of knowledge for universities tends to be treated as an individualistic, cognitive phenomenon formed by the ability to capture insights. From the perspectives of stakeholders, such research, in addition to being singularly unuseful, privileges “the perspectives of professional researchers in favor of the perspectives of the ordinary participants in social settings” (Kemmis & Taggart, 2000).

Such research, and its resultant policies, does little toward “fostering stakeholder agency, equitable power distribution and democratic dialogue as primary values, justified by democratic ideals of equity and fairness” (Greene, 1997, p. 173), or fostering “human flourishing” (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). The

technical rationality built into traditional forms of inquiry acts pro- and retro-actively to disenfranchise certain kinds of stakeholders, while undermining democratic values and privileging elites (Lincoln, 2001). This conception of knowledge is the dominant methodology in the social sciences, and, therefore, it has become necessary to find alternative, effective methods to challenge this view.

Compatibility of Participatory Action Research

Approach with Early Head Start Project

Action research is a term for several approaches that have emerged from different traditions, but have certain common characteristics. It involves research that contributes actively and directly to processes of democratic social change and simultaneous creation of valid social knowledge. It democratizes research processes through the inclusion of the local stakeholders as co-researchers (Greenwood & Levin, 1998).

The action research approach I used for this dissertation is PAR. Its intent was to give voice to those who have previously been marginalized and excluded from opportunities to produce findings that are meaningful and useful to them. It is an emancipatory practice aimed at helping a marginalized group to identify and act on social policies and practices that keep unequal power relations in place. In this way PAR is seen as challenging traditional notions of change and change agency that bring in outside experts to solve local problems. PAR tempers this expert knowledge with the expertise of locals about their own problems and solutions (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

Like all forms of inquiry, PAR is value laden. PAR takes place in settings that reflect a society characterized by conflicting values and an unequal distribution of resources and power. The heart of PAR is challenging the power relations and what those relations mean for all aspects of knowledge production (Maguire, 2005). Being involved in the process of PAR provides real discussion of real issues, and real actions toward real change that can threaten the status quo, the kinds of activities that potentially disrupt accepted inequalities.

The active stance and positionality of the researcher played a major role in the interpretation of the data for the dissertation. PAR takes place in settings that reflect a society characterized by conflicting values and an unequal distribution of resources and power. Here the notion of reflexivity is crucial because action researchers must interrogate received notions of improvement or solutions in terms of who ultimately benefits from the actions undertaken (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

An assumption of PAR is that human beings have useful knowledge that can and should inform the shaping of their community lives. According to Greenwood and Levin (1998), “action research rests on the belief and experience that all people, researchers included-accumulate, organize, and use complex knowledge constantly in everyday life” (p. 4). PAR is receiving increased attention in human services. As this is the area in which I have spent most of my career, I am keenly aware of the need for change in this arena. Knowledge created by social sciences needs to lead to solutions for social problems. And it can begin with the grassroots effort of a PAR project.

Early Head Start Participatory Action Research Project

I initially designed my dissertation proposal as a PAR project with Early Head Start parents, Early Head Start practitioners, and community stakeholders. They were to become engaged in work to collaboratively design a measurement scale that would identify and measure long-term outcomes of their program in a manner that was meaningful to them. The steps involved in this process were “define the problems to be examined, co-generate knowledge about them, learn and execute social research techniques, take actions, and interpret the results of actions based on what they have learned” (Greenwood & Levin, 1998, p. 4). PAR democratizes the relationship between the professional researcher and the local stakeholders.

This research was about us becoming ethnographers as we interviewed others about what they valued most in the program, but was also about much more. My voice, the voice of Early Head Start parents, community stakeholders, the voices of others using PAR including theorists, academic researchers, and institutional review boards. IRBs are also presented in dialogue around the issues discovered in this process. The research was also about the voices that were not heard.

Research Questions

The organization of this project centered around two objectives. The first objective was for multiple stakeholders to design a measurement scale from a strength-based perspective to determine long-term outcomes for Early Head Start families in a rural area. The second objective, which was the focus of this dissertation, was to explore the process of how PAR worked to increase the strength of local voice of Early Head Start parents, Early Head Start practitioners, and community stakeholders in cycles of relevant dialogue during the development of a PAR project. Therefore, the focal point for my dissertation was to study how the process of PAR impacted local voice, focusing on the following primary questions:

1. To what extent and in what ways do the principles of PAR contribute to impacting the strength of local voice in relevant dialogue during the development of this project?
2. How do those who participate in the PAR project perceive that their voice has made a contribution?

It used qualitative inquiry to observe a PAR approach that equitably involved all partners in the research process. Insights discovered through qualitative inquiry in this research highlight the co-researchers' efforts to strengthen their voice within their own program and community.

Participatory Action Research and University Settings

PAR is a form of research growing in popularity that presents distinctive ethical issues within the university setting, especially for the IRBs that follow established codes of ethics. Currently there appears to be fundamental societal rifts in the ethical perspectives between IRB and PAR, and the disputes derived from these rifts are not so easily remedied (Pritchard, 2002). IRBs are often stymied by the purposes of PAR which transcend mere knowledge generation to include personal and professional growth and organizational and community empowerment.

The content and methodology of IRBs are based on utilitarian ethics. The IRB system considers value-neutral science accountable to utilitarian standards in the service of impartial academic institutions. Regulations once rooted in scientific and medical experiments now extend to humanistic inquiry in natural settings. Herein lies many of the complexities of attempting to carry out this PAR dissertation in a university setting and has led to critical reflection on the ethical challenges brought out by the IRB's influence on this process. Events took place during this period that significantly limited our choices. While the PAR project was designed to provide opportunities for Early Head Start participants to engage in critical dialogue about power and meaning of voice, the constraints levied by the IRB lead to the silencing of many voices instead.

Therefore, a third objective was added to this study:

3. Explore and examine the interconnections and tensions that emerged between PAR and IRB as experienced by the practitioner/researcher through this dissertation.

While some IRBs have been criticized for drawing inappropriate conclusions in their reviews of proposed PAR projects, a different lens was pursued in the spirit of seeking to balance the tensions between the need to acknowledge differences and diversity, and the need to re-conceptualize collective solutions, agendas, and alliances. Construing these differences in light of the Habermasian (1987) theory of system and lifeworld made sense in light of many of the issues being confronted by those attempting PAR in university settings needing IRB review.

Therefore, the role of the IRB on this process was analyzed. The impact of the study went beyond articulating local voice. The process of engaging in PAR served as the catalyst for widening the lens of broader issues that needed to be addressed in order for PAR to be seen as an effective mode of research for those involved within the human services arena. This dissertation is significant because it expanded our knowledge about the dimensions of power in relationships and the ethical challenges faced in finding space within the university to engage in PAR.

In summary, it was my intent to demonstrate how a project that used the principles of PAR and involved a small group of Early Head Start mothers as co-researchers contributed to local understanding of voice as well as the limitations

of participation when all stakeholders were not at the table due to ethical differences between traditional research and PAR. Critical issues explored included the dynamics of power in relationships along with structural and institutional forces that emerged in the course of this dissertation. Many universities are wrestling with this now, and the answers have not yet become apparent. We can collectively make a contribution to this emerging field by using this as an opportunity for learning along with hopes of ameliorating these difficulties and creating legitimation for PAR.

This research also added to the body of knowledge by making the principles of PAR visible and explicit so they could be analyzed, further developed, and effectively applied to a range of human service issues in a diversity of community contexts. In Chapter Two I present a review of the literature, beginning with critical theory, the theoretical framework that guided this dissertation, following with an extensive review of PAR. This section ends with a critique of the literature in regards to power and ethical challenges between the IRB and PAR.

In Chapter Three I demonstrate the compatibility of the PAR framework with this project. I also discuss the specific research methods utilized to gather and analyze the data that supports this representation of the project. Chapter Four focuses on the context of the study itself. I provide a detailed analysis of the substantive issue of human service systems and the role of program evaluations. This chapter draws on both the literature of this substantive field as well as the local context itself to illustrate the need for changes in how program evaluations

are done in the current human service system. In Chapter Five I present a narrative description of key events that emerged over the course of this dissertation. Chapter Six presents an analysis of the findings. In Chapter Seven I summarize the findings and offer discussion on some ideas that became apparent from the study. The chapter also includes some recommendations for PAR development and for further research on the topic in general.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

I chose to use critical theory to guide this study. Critical theorists work to transform social relations of power by empowering those who are marginalized, by enabling them to give voice to and critically analyze their experience. It also provides them with a language of possibility intended to inform and promote the transformation of social inequality and injustice (Giroux & McLaren, 1991). This study represents an effort by local Early Head Start mothers to explore the strength of their voice in relevant dialogue during the development of this project.

Critical theory explores the forces that prevent stakeholders from shaping the decisions that critically affect their lives (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). Critical theorists have always advocated varying degrees of social action. It is connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or public sphere within the society.

While there are several philosophers who have had extraordinary influence on the development of critical theory, I primarily used the work of Paulo Freire and Jurgen Habermas to provide the foundation for this discussion. Friere's work focused on raising people's consciousness and encouraged them to engage in critical reflection inextricably linked to political action in the real world. He underscored the fact that praxis is never easy and always involves power struggles (Kamberelis & Dimitiadis, 2005). Freire inspired the poor to

hope that they could have a voice in making life decisions. Through dialogue, Freire (1970) argues, the oppressed are able to actually experience their world and as a result question it.

An exploration of the relevance of critical theory for PAR is also seen in the work of Habermas. His notion of the public sphere links critical theory and the practice of PAR together. PAR offers an opportunity to create forums in which people can join one another as co-participants in the struggle to remake the practices in which they interact (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Habermas believes human social life rests on our capacity to have clear communication with each other. He argues that knowledge production is never neutral, but is always pursued with some interest in mind.

I will first present an overview of some of the key themes of the critical theory literature such as social injustice, power, role of communication, and social change. This will be followed by a historical context of action research, along with definitions, the variety and efficacy of action research, and the key principles of participatory action research that will guide this study. Finally, I will explore the complexities of power as well as the challenges of power and ethics when conducting PAR within university settings.

Critical Theory

Some 70 years after its development in Frankfurt, Germany, critical theorists set out to use research to critique society, raise consciousness, and change the balance of power in favor of those less powerful. Critical theory still retains its ability to disrupt and challenge the status quo. According to Argyris,

Putnam, and Smith (1985), “critical theory seeks to engage human agents in public self-reflection in order to transform their world” (p. 2).

From the very first, the point of critical theory was to show how repressive interests were hidden by the supposedly neutral formulations of science. Critical theory opposes mechanistic materialism and all ahistorical forms of interpretation, and emphasizes the dialectical method and the importance of the idealist tradition for Marxism. Its concern with consciousness and overcoming alienation has led to an explicit commitment to the abolition of social injustice (Bronner, 2004). Critical theory projects an emancipatory promise and a new interdisciplinary perspective seeking to inform the struggles of the oppressed.

Critical theory focuses on how injustice and subjugation shape people’s experiences and understandings of the world. It attempts to expose the forces that prevent individuals and groups from shaping the decisions that crucially affect their lives. According to Kincheloe and McLaren (2000):

A critical social theory is concerned in particular with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class, and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion and other social institutions and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system Inquiry that inspires to the name critical must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustices of a particular society Research thus becomes a transformative endeavor unembarrassed by the label political and unafraid to consummate a relationship with emancipatory consciousness. (p. 281-291)

In this context, critical theory analyzes competing power interests between groups and individuals within a society--identifying who wins and who loses in specific situations. Privileged groups often have an interest in supporting the status quo to protect their advantages; the dynamics of such efforts often become a central focus of critical research.

Paulo Friere

It was the appearance of Friere's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) that galvanized critical researchers in the United States. His work is instructive in relation to constructing research that contributes to the struggle for a better world (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). For Friere (1970), power is a central notion in social analysis as it is with critical theory; the issue for him is how people can empower themselves. He insists that only with everyone filling his or her own political space, to the point of civil disobedience as necessary, will empowerment mean anything revolutionary. What is non-negotiable in his theory of power is participation of the oppressed in directing cultural formation. If an important social issue needs resolution, the most vulnerable will have to lead the way (Christians, 2005).

Freire's research was always concerned with human suffering; his work is a model of critical theory that contributes significantly to the struggle for a better world. Freire insisted on involving the people he studied as subjects to be partners in the research process. He immersed himself in their way of thinking and modes of perception, encouraging them all along to begin thinking about their own thinking. All involved in his research joined in the process of

investigation, examination, criticism, and reinvestigation; everyone learned to see more critically, think more critically, and to recognize the forces that subtly shape their lives (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Freire used participatory research as a way to highlight paths toward greater humanization and away from dehumanization.

For Freire (1970), transformation and liberation come only through one's awareness of the social, political, and economic relations in and out of which one's existence is negotiated and taking action to challenge those structures and relations of oppression. This process of liberation necessitates the practice of praxis, the synthesis of "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 33).

What gives critical theory its name is that it seeks not to just study and understand society but rather to critique and change society. Influenced by Marxism, informed by the presumption of the centrality of class conflict in understanding community and societal structures (Carchedi, 1983; Crotty, 1998; Heydebrand, 1983), and updated in the radical struggles of the 1960s, critical theory provides a framework for approaching research as fundamentally and explicitly political, and as change-oriented forms of engagement (Patton, 2002).

Drawing on Freire, critical theorists defined constraints on freedom, less in terms of economic exploitation, than the "silencing" of the "voices" of the oppressed. They claim that power submerges the marginalized in what Freire had termed a "culture of silence," distorting their consciousness so that they come to experience repressive needs as their own and to view their position of

powerlessness as natural and inevitable. Critical theory, by this view, is emancipatory in the sense that it enables the marginalized to find their own voices (Freire & Giroux, 1989), frees them from repressive needs and helps them recognize their real needs (McLaren, 1995). Research grounded in critical theory empowers the marginalized by providing them with the skills, knowledge, and other tools they need to understand the causes and effects of their oppression, as well as tapping their “hidden utopian desire” for justice and equality (McLaren, 1995).

Jurgen Habermas

Critical theory tradition argues that meaningful human knowledge must not merely understand the world, but also change it; it must be normative and oriented to action as well as descriptive or exploratory. One crucial tenet of critical theory is that the full realization of human life in society requires the mobilization of rationality that includes knowledge of moral values relevant in everyday living (Habermas, 1971, 1973, 1984, 1987). A central task of critical theory must be to formulate the basis of critique itself (Sitton, 2003). This form of critique is a product of group deliberation in which concerned parties present arguments for and against a moral stance, an understanding of the problematic situation or a course of action to be taken, and ideally discuss them according to criteria of rational discourse (Habermas, 1971).

In *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984) Habermas discusses the process by which participants test for themselves the comprehensibility, accuracy, sincerity, and moral appropriateness of the substantive content of

these processes as it applies to their own situations. He described communicative action as what people do when they engage in communication of a particular and widespread kind, with three particular features (1984, 1987b). It is communication in which people consciously and deliberately strive for intersubjective agreement, mutual understanding, and unforced consensus about what to do in the particular situation in which they find themselves (Kemmis & McTagget, 2005).

In *Between Facts and Norms*, Habermas (1996) added a fourth feature to this list. He noticed that communicative action also opens communicative space between people, leading to his belief that this fourth feature of communicative action produces two particular and simultaneous effects. First, it builds solidarity between the people who open their understandings to one another in this kind of communication. Second, it underwrites the understandings and decisions that people reach with legitimacy. Habermas's argument is that legitimacy is guaranteed only through communicative action, that is, when people are free to choose and decide--authentically and for themselves, individually and in the context of mutual participation (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005).

Habermas (1996) argues that when a dispute arises that must be resolved by reaching understanding with each other; individuals attempt to collectively and collaboratively establish what their situation is. They develop a common understanding by giving reasons for their differing perspectives on what is the source of the dispute. Beliefs and actions inherently claim to be valid. As

Habermas puts it, these validity claims, when challenged must be redeemed through reasons and arguments (Sitton, 2003).

Understanding cannot be compelled; it can only be intersubjectively achieved. Individuals trying to understand each other can only restore their common convictions on the basis of reason; for the attempt to be successful, participants must surrender to the “force of a better argument” (Habermas, 1987). That is, understanding can only be achieved if the participants are sincere in their engagement of reasons, rather than merely manipulating the opinions of others for their own strategic ends (Sitton, 2003). Habermas’s theory of communicative action was a decisive contribution to substantive social theory; it privileged the kind of reflection and discussion we do when we interrupt what we are doing to explore its nature, dynamics, and worth (Kemmis, 2001).

Habermas has written extensively on matters that are pivotal to understanding the nature of praxis and of its significance to democracy and to discourse related to the consensual judgment upon which it depends. One of his key insights has been to argue that knowledge is always linked to purpose and thus, the need for a variety of different ways of knowing in order that different purposes can be accommodated. Initially he described three different categories of knowledge--technical, practical, and emancipatory (Habermas, 1971). After reorienting his ideas from purpose to notions concerning language and consensual action, he later synthesized these to two--instrumental rationality and communicative action (Habermas, 1984). From an initial concern with the individual searching to understand the worlds of nature, Habermas shifted his

starting point to the social act of language, the dialogue of people attempting through language to communicate with one another to achieve mutual understanding and consensual action (Baldwin, 2003). Communicative action has as its purpose the search for mutual, rational understanding in order to realize common goals that embrace the values and intuitions and assumptions that might be seen to concern a culture.

*Theory of System and Lifeworld and the
Notion of Public Spheres*

The theory of communicative action includes a substantive theory (the theory of system and lifeworld) which offers a new way of construing many of the problems critical action researchers ran into on the PAR projects they worked with. These problems occurred for participants in a setting when the personal, social, and cultural processes that sustained the setting as a lifeworld collide with processes which characterize the setting as a system (the means-end functionality of systems oriented to outcomes or success) (Kemmis, 2002).

The theory of system and lifeworld provides a theoretical discourse clarifying a significant shift in the social conditions of late modernity. It allows us to articulate problems which have emerged in late modernity as social problems have become more extensive, and as problems of integrating different kinds of social organizations and systems have emerged (Park, 2002).

The theory of system and lifeworld offers a way of understanding participant's perspectives as structured by the contrasting and sometimes

competing imperatives of social systems and the lifeworld participants inhabit.

Kemmis and McTaggart's (2002) theory describes these tensions as:

On one hand, participants understand themselves and their practices as formed by system structures and functions that shape and constrain their actions, and that their efforts to change their practices necessarily involve encountering and reconstructing the system aspect of their social world.

On the other side, participants also understand themselves and their practices as formed through the lifeworld processes of cultural representation, social integration, and socialization-individuation, and that their efforts to change their practices necessarily involve changing the substance of these processes. (p. 567)

PAR can explore how practices in the setting enmeshed participants in systems functioning--the exchanges and transformations taking place to yield outcomes of intent to those involved, to the systems of which they are a part, and to the wider environment beyond. The overall task of critical theory using a PAR approach is to explore and address the interconnections and tensions between system and lifeworld aspects of a setting as they are lived out in practice (Park, 2002).

In the *Philosophical Discourses of Modernity*, Habermas (1987b) continues to develop the theory of communicative action. He argues that there are interwoven, interlocking, overlapping networks of social relations which galvanize power and discourses in different directions and in different ways in relation to the personal, the social and cultural realms.

In *Between Facts and Norms*, Habermas (1996) takes this notion further by developing the notion of public spheres, to show how it is an open realm of intersecting discourses. The democratic process of communicative action in the public sphere makes it possible for ideas to circulate freely and to be explored sufficiently for them to attain legitimacy. Therefore, in a PAR project grounded in critical theory, this space can be seen as a more open and fluid space constituted to create conditions of communicative freedom (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). They are established as self-constituting spheres as co-researchers become engaged and committed to local action but with a wider critical and emancipatory vision for their work. PAR projects can be understood in relation to, and as a contribution to, wider processes of social movement. The critical theory of Habermas is relevant to the central problems of contemporary social theory and strongly resonates with the work of PAR by creating a shared communicative space in which people act together openly and with a commitment to making a difference in their community.

Historical Context of Participatory Action Research

Action research began over 60 years ago with social scientists' attempting to help solve practical problems in wartime situations in both Europe and America. Kurt Lewin's (1948) ideas about action research appear to dominate the literature and he is generally credited as the person who coined the term "action research." Many writers on action research (Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Gustavsen, 2001; Pasmore, 2001) trace its origins back to Lewin's social experiments in the 1940s at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in

London. It was during this time that Lewin's practices of social democracy and organizational change were strongly linked with action research. In this work, it was essentially the researchers who set the agenda and engineered the social processing activity in such a way as to set changes in perception and behavior within the group of actors (Cousins & Earl, 1995).

Lewin first used the term "action research" in his 1946 paper "Action Research and Minority Problems":

The research needed for social practice can best be characterized as research for social management or social engineering. It is a type of action-research, a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action, and research leading to social action. It uses a process of a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact finding about the result of the action.

Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice. (Lewin 1946, reproduced in Lewin, 1948, p. 202-203)

Eric Trist, psychiatrist in applied social research at Tavistock focused more on large-scale, multi-organizational problems (Pasmore, 2001). Both Lewin and Trist applied their research to systemic change in and between organizations. They emphasized direct professional--client collaboration and affirmed the role of group relations as basis for problem-solving (Pasmore, 2001). Both were avid proponents of the principle that decisions are best implemented by those who help make them.

Lewin's (1948) earlier work on action research reflects tension between providing a rational basis for change through research, and the recognition that individuals are constrained in their ability to change by their cultural and social perceptions, and the systems of which they are a part. Lewin (1948) stressed that having the right knowledge does not in itself lead to change; attention also needs to be paid to the integration of theory and practice. This theme was symbolized in one of his best known quotations: "there is nothing so practical as a good theory" (Greenwood & Levin, 1998, p. 19).

Lewin's contributions to action research include creating a new role for researchers and redefining criteria for judging the quality of an inquiry process. He shifted the researcher's role from being a distant observer to involvement in concrete problem solving. The quality criteria he developed for judging a theory to be good focused on its ability to support practical problem solving in real-life situations (Greenwood & Levin, 1998).

While Lewin's work is a fundamental building block for action research, Reason and Bradbury (2001) contend that the evolution of action research can be traced back to the Marxist dictum that the important thing is not to understand the world but to change it. They also state that through the theorizing of Gramsci, the educational work of Freire, and the participatory research practice of those working for the liberation of the oppressed and underprivileged of this world, action research is truly a living movement worldwide for which no one person or community can claim ownership (Reason & Bradbury, 2001).

Freire (1970) in particular emphasized the importance of helping disadvantaged people develop critical thinking. By doing so, they could understand the ways in which they were disadvantaged by the political and economic conditions of their lives and could develop their own organized action in order to address these issues. Freire (1970) states:

The starting point must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people. We must pose this existential, concrete situation to the people as a problem which challenges them and requires a response – not just an intellectual response, but at a level of action. (p. 85)

The work of Horton and Gavanta (1981) of the Highlander Center served as an early inspiration for participatory research in North America. Action research did suffer a decline in favor during the 1960s because of its association with radical political activism (Stringer, 1999). However, it was the appearance of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in English in 1970 that galvanized critical researchers in the U.S. Action research has subsequently gained a significant foothold in research, and a variety of approaches have emerged that involve differing conceptualizations of action research. These recent developments place emphasis on a full integration of action and reflection and on increased collaboration between all those involved in the inquiry project, so that the knowledge developed in the inquiry process is directly relevant to the issues being studied. Thus action research is conducted *by, with, and for* people, rather than research *on* people (Greenwood & Levin, 1998).

Definitions of Participatory Action Research

The literature on action research presents several definitions to frame and understand this approach to inquiry that is participative, grounded in experience, and action-oriented (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). The term action research includes a wide range of approaches and practices, each grounded in different traditions, in different philosophical assumptions, pursuing different political commitments. In this section I will discuss common aspects and varieties of action research along with the efficacy of action research and conclude with the specific principles of participatory action research that I used for this dissertation.

Commonality of Participatory Action Research Definition

From many of the definitions available in the literature, it is evident that a common goal of action research is to create knowledge that produces social change. Most authors also refer to Lewin's continuous spiral--planning, acting, observing, reflecting, and planning again (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Park, 2001; Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Whyte, 1989). This creates the conditions under which learning communities may be established, communities of inquirers committed to learning about and understanding the problems and effects of their own strategic action (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). The process of inquiry and stimulation of a group toward reconstructing their social reality is the primary aim of action research. Action research explicitly and purposefully becomes part of the change process by engaging the people in the program or organization in studying their own problems in order to solve their problems (Whyte, 1989).

Over time action research definitions have expanded to emphasize ongoing dialogue more frequently (Gustavsen, 2001) and co-generative learning as a vehicle for sustained change (Elden & Levin, 1991). Understanding the process of conducting action research has become of central importance. This includes the ways in which stakeholders are involved, which particular stakeholders participate, how less powerful voices can be fairly heard, who speaks for and with whom (Greene, 2000). Baldwin (2003) describes the essence of action research as the collaboration of people to explore complex problematic situations in a system with the aim of creating change that is socially desirable, culturally feasible, and ethically defensible.

In one of the most commonly cited definitions of action research in the literature review, Greenwood and Levin (1998) define action research as “social science research carried out by a team consisting of a professional researcher and members of a community interactively participating to improve their situation” (p. 4). They further describe action research as a conjunction of research, action, and participation to generate knowledge claims for the express purpose to promote social change.

Furthermore, action research is context-bound, aimed at addressing real-life problems, as well as a democratic process where stakeholders bring their diversity of experiences and capacities to collectively generate knowledge and take collective action (Greenwood & Levin, 1998). Action research is constituted by a series of communicative actions that take place in dialogical environments created by communities or other organizations for the purpose of the

cogeneration of new knowledge, the development of plans of action, and the democratization of society. It is a form of discussion, of critical communication that generates new and often-painful knowledge (Greenwood & Levin, 1998).

Reason and Bradbury (2001) further define action research as a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview. They state, “it seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities” (p. 1).

The analysis of the literature dealing with action research shows that it is potentially transformative as people gain confidence in the knowledge that they have something worth sharing. It recognizes that the interaction between local knowledge and outside knowledge opens up a dialogue that can transform the views of researchers and community members and can create a shared sense of the problems where practical interventions are required and possible.

The commonalities of the definitions discussed above suggest that action researchers are committed to a set of elements that involve collaborative dialogue, participatory decision-making, inclusive democratic deliberation, and the maximal participation and representation of all relevant parties (Ryan & Destefano, 2000).

Variety of Participatory Action Research Approaches

A variety of approaches have emerged that involve differing conceptualizations of participatory inquiry, including participatory action research (Fals Borda, 2001); co-operative inquiry (Heron, 1996); action inquiry (Torbert, 1991); and action science (Argyris, 1985). While there is some overlap among these approaches, there are also some important differences reflecting varying experiences within this work.

Participatory Action Research is often associated with social transformation in the Third World. It has its roots in liberation theology and neo-Marxist approaches to community development and in human rights activism (Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991). Its philosophy of life is committed to social renovation for justice.

Co-operative inquiry is a distinctive and wide-ranging form of participative research in which people use the full range of their sensibilities to inquire together into any aspect of the human condition (Heron, 1996). It distinguishes between various formal features of inquiry groups and inquiry cultures, and considers how different ways of knowing are integrated into the inquiry process. Co-operative inquiry has also enabled people to research their own spiritual and subtle experience without dependence on external religious authorities (Heron, 2001).

Torbert's (1991) action inquiry offers person, second person, and third person's types of research that each of us can conduct in our practices. Action inquiry seeks, in each present moment, to integrate critical subjectivity,

compassionate intersubjectivity and constructive objectivity in a timely fashion (Torbert, 2001).

Action science attempts to bridge the gap between social research and social practice by building theories which explain social phenomena, inform practice, and adhere to the fundamental criteria of a science (Argyris, 1985). Argyris states that the main objective is to focus on knowledge that can be used to produce action, while at the same time contributing to a theory of action. He argues for a link between theory building and theory testing in action as a single repertoire of actions (Argyris, 1985).

The review of this literature shows the diversity and complexity of participatory approaches. There are a range of perspectives and values that inform these various approaches. It has emerged from diverse streams of intellectual and political thought, has flourished in business organizations and in rural villages, with formally educated people and with those strong in indigenous knowledge, and, among professionals seeking to improve their practices as well as with ordinary people dealing with the everyday problems of life. All of these approaches find ways to bring more creative and inquiring orientations to working with others.

Efficacy of Participatory Action Research

After several decades of slowly developing momentum, it appears that there is a considerable surge of PAR activity; from ordinary people doing it, government departments and businesses incorporating it; books, journals, and courses about it, and a wave of students working toward advanced degrees and

collaborating with their professors to explore spaces for conducting university based action research (Boser, Feroz, & Welliver, 2003). There is rich variety in this work. PAR involves taking the risks of a journey into the unknown in a context where the researcher can influence only a minority of the relevant elements. The results produced and the knowledge gained depends on the mutual involvement of local participants and professional researchers (Greenwood & Levin, 1998). The test of PAR is whether it provides effective support for the stakeholders actions, organizations and/or communities in their processes of self-determining social change (Greenwood & Levin, 1998).

The authors reviewed in the literature gave examples of successes and failures and lessons learned. Greenwood and Levin (1998) cite lessons learned from their community development project in Herencia, Spain. Positive outcomes included: showing that social adversaries could not only speak to each other but also plan and implement activities together; provided training and skills of participation and facilitation to a large group; identified specific initiatives that could be owned by a broad cross-section of the community, and brought the dynamism and initiative of this town to many officials, giving the town a reputation for activism in its own right.

Several examples of current exemplar work have been cited in the literature and share common themes (Whitmore & McGee, 2001; Swantz, Ndedya, & Masaiganah, 2001). A mark of quality in these projects is that people get energized and empowered by being involved, through which they develop newly useful reflexive insights as a result of critical growing consciousness

(Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Whitmore and McGee (2001) pay explicit attention to developing the quality of relationships within the group; this allowed for full participation of the youth that were working with them and produced a better product that captured the energy, color, and youthful spirit of the group. Swantz, Ndedya, and Masaiganah (2001), show literally life and death situations improved by the women's use of PAR. The women developed the skills they desperately needed, such as organization and representation, analysis and calculation, prioritizing and decision-making as well as access to resources. Over all, the women experienced heightened self-efficacy through their empowerment and new awareness.

These projects show that people with real issues at stake are willing to act on what has been learned in the course of their research. PAR is validated by participants' new ways of acting in light of the work they did; they are using what they learned.

However, it was my experiences in Petoria, South Africa at the 6th World Congress on Action Learning, Action Research, Process Management and Participatory Action Research that has convinced me of the depth of PAR's value. It was quite powerful to hear of the work being done not only on the African continent, often against great odds, but in 33 other countries representing an enormous array of experiences and projects from a wide range of settings and areas. One key intention there was to encourage thinking that crosses geographical and established boundaries and recognize that these approaches have the power to transform the face of social science. This involved many hours

of significant dialogue about getting valuable work done well and using the best of action research to help us build a better, freer society.

Principles of Participatory Action Research

A review of the literature on PAR has made it clear to me that that it is emergent and messy work because we all study extremely complex, dynamic, and difficult problems. No PAR project can address all issues equally; it is up to each researcher to choose the aspects of importance for their work.

While there are many important values and principles in PAR, and vary from person to person, in this section I will select and discuss the key principles of PAR that I believe distinguish it best from traditional research. These principles include: participation, knowledge generation, democracy, reflective practice, critical dialogue, power, human flourishing, and social action.

Participation

Interest in participatory research has exploded in recent years, especially as an element of larger community change efforts. When conducting research in a participatory, collaborative mode, professionals and nonprofessionals become co-researchers. PAR encourages joint participation and collaboration within a mutually acceptable framework to understand and/or solve organizational or community problems.

The presence of multiple, diverse voices are highly congruent with PAR. Developing processes for effective stakeholder inclusion and voice, for meaningful interaction and dialogue can lead to the possibilities of democratizing

action and change. By participating in the project rather than just receiving results secondhand, the findings will become more meaningful to them and more useful. People who participate in creating something tend to feel more ownership not only of their findings but also of the inquiry process itself (Greenwood & Levin, 1998). The goal of the participatory approach challenges us to share power and decision making as we journey with another human being. It is important to make sure that participation is genuine and authentic, not just token or rhetorical. Participation itself challenges existing hierarchies and power relations.

After reviewing a number of grassroots community development efforts, Uphoff (1991) concluded that if the process is carried out regularly and openly, with all group members participating, the answers they arrive at are in themselves not so important as what is learned from the discussion and from the process of reaching consensus about questions and engaging with each other in the meaning of the answers discovered.

Levin (1993) distinguished three purposes of participatory research: (1) the pragmatic purpose of increasing use of findings by those involved; (2) the philosophical or methodological purpose of grounding data in participants' perspectives; and, (3) the political purpose of mobilizing for social action. The participatory approaches attempt to engage stakeholders in determining the study's purpose, key questions, and sometimes its design and implementation. Much of the impact of participation rests on bringing together, on a level playing

field with the same agenda, groups of people who have diverse, unique perspectives, and seeing what transpires in an effort to affect change.

The establishment of participation in a world increasingly characterized by alienation and individualization is far more urgent and complex than we allow ourselves to believe. We need to keep deepening our understanding of what we are up to (Reason, 2003). PAR is a useful way to work together, not in a close minded, normative conformity, which generally leads to mediocrity, but in fostering and rewarding the talents, expertise, and strengths of individuals and groups who give their best to achieve maximum learning outcomes. This can lead to the highest quality in research and development for the common good of their communities.

Knowledge Generation

A primary purpose of PAR is to produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives. A wider purpose of PAR is to contribute through this practical knowledge to the increased well-being of people and communities (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Ordinary people generate knowledge in addressing these concerns as members of society.

The inquiry process looks for solutions to problems important to the local participants; therefore the knowledge produced by the inquiry process must increase participants' control over their own situation. It mobilizes relevant knowledge from people in a position to know their conditions far better than conventional researchers can with its extractive approach (Greenwood, 2002). Heron (1996) states, "to generate knowledge about persons without their full

participation in deciding how to generate it, is to misrepresent their personhood and to abuse by neglect their capacity for autonomous intentionality” (p. 21).

This is consistent with Freire’s (1970) concept of conscientization, which identifies the inquiry process as aimed at shaping knowledge relevant to action built on a critical understanding of social, historical, and political contexts within which the participants act. The participants must be able to use the knowledge that emerges, and this knowledge must support the enhancement of the participants (Greenwood & Levin, 1998). For Freire, this learning process is aimed at transforming the individual/collective consciousness by providing a context for people to become active participants in creating their own knowledge and critically examining their realities.

Since PAR starts with everyday experience and is concerned with the development of living knowledge, in many ways the process of inquiry is as important as specific outcomes. As this is a mutual learning process, new meanings and understandings are created through discourses between people engaged in the inquiry process. According to Greenwood and Levin (1998), this meaning construction process, linked to solving practical problems is the major knowledge generation element in PAR. It involves engagement among stakeholders for co-construction of a joint reality informed by multiple perspectives and integrating tacit knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Through a more open and democratic process new categories of knowledge, based on local realities, are framed and given voice.

PAR is emancipatory in that it not only leads to practical knowledge but to new abilities to create knowledge by paying attention, being open to what the world has to show us, and developing new patterns of thinking regarding the problems at hand. The essence of knowledge generation then involves both researchers and local stakeholders in the same action-learning process, thereby fulfilling both a democratic ideal, and achieving knowledge generation through learning from action.

Critical Dialogue

The metaphor of voice is common to PAR and has been influenced by feminist activism. The telling of, listening to, affirmation of, reflecting on, and analysis of personal stories from the ground up are potentially empowering PAR strategies drawn from women's organizing (Maguire, 2001). Feminist research and the Freirean philosophy emphasize that this raising of consciousness occurs when spaces are created whereupon "inquiry is pried open, inviting intellectual surprises to flourish" (Fine, 1992, p. 220). Within a context of dialogue and shared risk-taking, researchers "can critique what seems natural, spin images of what's possible, and engage in questions of how to move from here to there" (p. 220). Many researchers are now experimenting with processes that both allow the least powerful voices to express themselves as they want and need to, and safeguard the morale and affirm the good values held by the more powerful as they try to hear (Wadsworth, 2001).

The desire to give voice is derived not from an abstract or theoretical imperative but from the pragmatic focus of action research. Its intent is to

provide a place for the perspectives of people who have previously been marginalized from opportunities to develop and operate policies, programs and services--perspectives often concealed by the products of a typical research process (Stringer, 1999). PAR projects may open space for communication and dialogue where there was none before creating space for muted and silenced voices (McArdle, 2002), or where there were no forums for democratic dialogue (Gustavsen, 2001).

Dialogue occupies a central position by making it possible for participants to create a social space in which they can share experiences and information, create common meanings and forge concerted actions together. Dialogue is an expression of the human condition that impels people to come together as thinking and feeling beings to form a common entity that is larger than its constituent parts (Freire, 1970).

This dialogue is not a mere technique in the research process, but something that Freire (Shor & Freire, 1987) believes “must be understood as something taking part in the very historical nature of human beings” (p. 13). Therefore, continuing dialogue will be important; it requires empathy, identification with, and the inclusion of other people. Freire (1970) was convinced, based on years of work with oppressed people that only humble and loving dialogue can surmount the barrier of mistrust built from years of paternalism and the rampant subjugation of the knowledge and wisdom of the oppressed. “Founding itself upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical

consequences” (p. 79-80). With this kind of dialogue people can discover and test their own power and knowledge while confirming the importance of others.

Democracy

The concern for a deeper meaning of democracy is closely linked with PAR. Many argue that building democratic, participative, pluralist communities of inquiry is central to the work of PAR; that PAR is only possible with, for, and by persons and communities (Fals Borda, 2001; Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Heron, 1996; Kemmis 2001; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). PAR is about the transformation of power relationships in the direction of greater democracy. Greene (2000) and others contend that using a participatory approach will not only increase the use of the study’s findings, but it will make the study more democratic.

All persons should have the right and opportunity to participate in the deliberation and decision-making of the institutions to which their actions contribute or which directly affect their actions. These participatory processes are the best way for people to ensure their own needs and interests will be voiced and will not be dominated by other interests (Young, 1990).

Many democratic theorists have argued that democratic participation has an intrinsic value over and above the protection of interests, in providing important means for the development and exercise of capabilities such as thinking about one’s own needs in relation to the needs of others, taking an interest in the relation of others to social institutions, reasoning and being articulate and persuasive (Cunningham, 1987; Elkin, 1987; Gutmann, 1980).

Democracy is also a condition for the group's arriving at decisions whose substance and implications best promote distributive justice (Young, 1990). The argument for this claim relies on Habermas's conception of communicative ethics. The only ground for a claim that a decision is just is that it has been arrived at by a group which has truly promoted the free expression of all needs and points of view (Young, 1990).

Democratic decision-making tends to promote just outcomes because it is most likely to introduce standards of justice into decision-making processes and because it maximizes the social knowledge and perspectives that can lead to social change. The experiences for those involved in this process can have a lasting impact on how they think, on their openness to do look at things differently, on how they view the things they do, and on their capacity to engage thoughtfully in democratic processes.

Reflective Practice

PAR supports the perspectives on reflective practice developed by Donald Schön (1983, 1987). In his work, Schön introduces the concept of reflective practice to analyze the way in which professional competence is developed through training. He developed a conceptual apparatus that highlights the role of linked reflection and praxis in the development of professional skills. Knowledge is not imparted simply through the passage of concepts from a teacher to student, but rather through the interactions between them and their collective efforts to solve certain problems together through their actions. This process is an iterative one. Through action, knowledge is created, and analysis of the

knowledge may lead to new forms of action. Action without reflection and understanding is meaningless.

Kemmis (1985) discusses reflection as a dialectical process where it looks inward at our thoughts and thought processes and outward at the situation in which we find ourselves. He further states that when we consider the interaction of the internal and external, our reflection orients us to further thought and action. The significance of understanding reflection in action as dialectic is that it frames our understanding in an historical and political context. We do not reflect without reason; we reflect because something has happened to make us aware of ourselves (Kemmis, 1985).

By involving people in gathering information, knowledge production itself may become a form of mobilization; new solutions or actions are identified, tested and then tried again. Therefore, in PAR, knowledge must be embedded in cycles of action-reflection-action over time (Rahman, 1991). It is through such a process that the nature of action can be deepened, moving from practical problem solving to more fundamental social transformation. In this process, concerned parties present arguments for or against the understanding of the problematic situation and ideally discuss them according to criteria of rational discourse (Habermas, 1971).

Heron and Reason (2001) identify co-operative inquiry as going through four phases of reflection and action. This consists of a series of logical steps: engaging all participants in identifying the issues and questions to be researched; developing an explicit model or framework for practice; putting the model into

practice and recording what happens; and, reflecting on the experience and making sense of the whole venture (Reason, 1988). Groups cycle through these steps in a series of rigorous iterations of action and reflection. These cycles ideally balance divergence over several aspects of the inquiry topic with convergence on specific aspects, so there is a refined grasp of both the whole and its parts (Heron & Reason, 2001).

Learning cannot take place without reflection. In reflective practice, reflection is the essential part of the learning process because it results in making sense of from the experience. Concerted engagement in change producing activities requires conscious reflection on the part of those involved. It upholds the dignity of human beings to act effectively and responsibly on their own behalf in the context of their interdependent relationships.

Human Flourishing

In reviewing the principles of PAR, many authors allude to this concept; however, Reason and Bradbury (2001) are the only authors that specifically use the words “human flourishing.” Fals Borda (2001) calls it “vivencia,” meaning life experience, developing an empathetic attitude toward others. Aristotle’s “phronesis” was also added to this way of thinking during the first World Symposium of Action Research in 1977 at Catagena, Columbia (Fals-Borda, 2001). This refers to wise judgment and prudence for the achievement of the good life. Phronesis should furnish serenity in participatory political processes; it should help to find the middle measure and the proper proportion for our aspirations (Fals Borda, 2001). Phronesis is best understood as the design of

action through collaborative knowledge construction from the legitimate stakeholders in a problematic situation. The complexities involved in phronesis--intellectual, contextual and social--lead to a creation of new space for collaborative reflection, contrast, and integration of many kinds of knowledge systems; all stakeholders have legitimate knowledge claims and rights to determine outcome. All share an interest in the adequacy of the outcomes achieved in relation to the goals; phronesis involves an egalitarian engagement across knowledge systems and diverse experiences.

Reason and Torbet (2001) state:

Human beings are all participating actors in the world, the purpose of inquiry is not simply or even primarily to contribute to the fund of knowledge in a field, to deconstruct taken-for-granted realities, or even to develop emancipatory theory, but rather to forge a more direct link between intellectual knowledge and moment to moment personal and social action, so that inquiry contributes directly to the flourishing of human persons, their communities, and the ecosystems of which they are a part.

(p. 2)

I believe these are powerful words and that PAR has the ability to contribute to the flourishing of people and communities. Those that have committed themselves to doing PAR do so because they have become increasingly preoccupied with life conditions, which appear unbearable in their communities. They view PAR not only as a research methodology but also as a

philosophy of life. By focusing on human flourishing means that ordinary people deserve to know more about their own life conditions in order to defend them.

PAR has not been just a quest for knowledge, but also a transformation of individual attitudes and values. At the 1997 World Congress members felt that this philosophy could be enriched by adding values such as altruism, sincerity of intent, trust, autonomy, and social responsibility (Fals Borda, 2001). This leads to a wider purpose of action research to increase the well-being--economic, political, psychological, spiritual--of people and their communities (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). It also leads us to consider our relationship with others with whom we act and directs our attention to questions that are worthwhile, what values and purpose are worthy of pursuit in improving local conditions and in people's self-reliance and empowerment.

Given the conditions of our times, a primary purpose of human inquiry is not so much to search for truth but to heal and instill hope. It is incumbent on those that use PAR to find ways for this penchant for the possible and unimaginable to find expression in life-affirming ways. Healing and hope in the possible are central to human flourishing. Before his death, Freire wrote in *Pedagogy of Hope* (1996), that he had previously underestimated the power of hope:

But the attempt to do without hope, in the struggle to improve the world, as if that struggle could be reduced to calculated acts alone, or a purely scientific approach, is a frivolous illusion. To attempt to do without hope, which is based on the need for truth as an ethical quality of the struggle, is

tantamount to denying the struggle as one of its mainstays Hope as an ontological need, demands an anchoring in practice Without a minimum of hope, we cannot so much as start the struggle. (p. 8-9)

Power

PAR takes place within a force field of power relations in which conflicts of interest often create resistance to the research. PAR seeks to unsettle and change these power relations and structures. Unsettling power relations are multifaceted, ranging from redefining power to rethinking the purposes of knowledge creation to reworking the relations of the research process itself (Maguire, 2002). Restructuring the power dynamics of the research process in an effort to share power between researcher and the participants is at the heart of PAR. Lather (1991) challenges us to “develop a kind of self-reflexivity that will enable us to look closely at our own practice in terms of how we contribute to dominance in spite of our liberatory intentions” (p. 150).

Reinharz (1992) observes:

By dealing in voices, we are affecting power relations. To listen to people is to empower them ... before you can expect to hear anything worth hearing, you have to examine the power dynamics of the space and the social actors. (p. 706)

Noffke (1998) cautions that regardless of how we see our positions, we do not give voice to those in less powerful positions. Rather we must see ourselves as part of the process of breaking apart the barriers for speakers and listeners,

writers and readers, which are perpetuated through and act to support our privileged.

The contribution of Foucault (1980) to the power discussion lies in his conceptualization of power as being ubiquitous and dynamic, present in all social relations. He links power and knowledge together as one concept; he observed that “the exercise of power perceptually creates knowledge and conversely knowledge constantly induces effects of power. Foucault rejected the premise that power is directed by agents who “have” or “use” it. In a frequently cited passage, Foucault asserted that power “comes from below . . . there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations” (p. 94). “Power reaches into the very grains of individuals, and inserts itself into their very actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives” (1980a, p. 39).

At any point in history, certain understandings of power prevail resulting from the power of particular groups at any one time to promote their frames of discourse to the exclusion or marginalization of others (Foucault, 1977). In his middle period works, Foucault (1977, 1978, 1980) analyzes modern power as a mobile and constantly shifting set of force relations that emerge from every social interaction and thus pervade the social body. As he puts it, “power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (1978, p. 93).

Foucault was concerned with the structural relationships, institutions, strategies, and techniques rather than with the concrete policies and the actual

people they involve. He conceived power broadly, seeking to uncover its least evident and least perceptible forms. "Individuals are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realized" (1982, p. 221).

In his later writings Foucault emphasized "that power relations are never seamless but are always spawning new forms of culture and subjectivity, new opportunities for transformation; that where there is power there is also resistance (Bordo, 2003). His focus was on the way these power relations are organized, the forms they take and the techniques they depend upon rather than upon the groups and individuals who dominate or who are dominated as a consequence.

Across a broad spectrum of institutions that shape our lives, people have power over other people--the ability to control, manipulate, and coerce other people for their own ends. In PAR, power is understood as domination in which the control of knowledge and its production is as important as material and other social relations. As Rahman (1991) stated:

Domination of masses by elites is rooted not only in the polarization of control over means of material production, but also over the means of knowledge production, including control over the social power to determine what is useful knowledge. (p. 4)

But despite the persuasiveness of patterns of domination, we as individual human beings acting with others can be agents of social change. Such action against power over relations implies conflict in which the power of the

dominant class is challenged, as the relatively powerless begin to develop their new awareness of their reality, and to act for themselves (Selener, 1997). PAR specifically aims to reopen dialogue and to counter attempts by power holders to predetermine the future.

Social Change

PAR is driven by an ideological commitment to achieve reform, democratize research or society, or overcome injustice (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Greenwood & Levin, 1998; McTaggart, 1997; Whyte, 1991). Greenwood and Levin (1998) argue that relevant actions to solve problems are the first outcome of the action research process. It is putting social research to use for democratic change. The ultimate goal of PAR in this perspective is not simply to communicate new voices, but “the radical transformation of social reality and improvement in the lives of people involved Solutions are viewed as processes through which subjects become social actors, participation, by means of grassroots mobilizations in actions tended to transform society” (Selener, 1997, p. 19-21).

In Greenwood and Levin’s (1998) definition of action research, the action/social change is not just any kind of change. They are quite explicit that scholars have a responsibility to work that is socially meaningful and socially responsible. Action research aims to increase the ability of the involved community or organization members to control their own destinies more effectively and to keep improving their capacity to do so. The process of people gaining control over knowledge and skills normally considered being the

monopoly of the experts is empowering and produces much more than information. It reopens the possibilities for change, enhances a sense of responsibility for the direction of the future, and emphasizes the sense that human agency, not impartial control systems is the centerpiece of social change. A basic vision of PAR is to bring knowledge and skills to a group of people who collaboratively open up possibilities for self-managed social change.

PAR groups and projects often arise in relation to broad social movements such as the women's movement, peace movement, the civil rights movement, and other movements for social transformation. They frequently arise to explore alternative ways of doing things in settings where the impact of those movements is otherwise unclear or uncertain. They draw on the resources of those social movements and feed back into the broader movements, both in terms of the general political potency of the movements and in terms of understanding how the objectives and methods of those movements play out in particular kinds of situations and settings being investigated (Kemmis & McTagget, 2005).

PAR exists to promote liberating social change. While different strands of action research differ greatly in what they understand as liberating, the value commitment is an essential part of the work. This is truly a social science because it begins and ends in socially meaningful, reciprocal relationships (Greenwood, 2002).

Exploring the Complexities of Power

During the course of this dissertation, critical issues emerged relevant to the dynamics of power in relationships and therefore warrant further discussion.

Power's expression and forms can range from domination and resistance to collaboration and transformation. Understanding of underlying power relationships and interests is a key aspect when working with the complexities of power. Failure to do so can lead to missed opportunities and poor strategic choices. Thomas Carothers (1999) of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace emphasizes what he calls "the missing link of power" as one key factor undermining change efforts. Giving little or no attention to structures of power and interests, he points out, has led to many program failures. One of the major challenges that need to be addressed is how to incorporate a close, thoughtful analysis of relevant interests and power relationships into our processes of sociopolitical change.

The concept of power is not a settled one in the social sciences, either in political science or in sociology (Parsons, 1957). Power is a concept that has sparked widespread and seemingly intractable disagreements among those philosophers and social and political theorists who have devoted their careers to analyzing and conceptualizing it. There are endless debates and no signs of imminent resolution (Lukes, 2005). This section will consider the influences that have shaped the conceptualization of power and search for emerging frameworks that provide alternative perspectives to understanding power.

Three Foundations of Contemporary Power Theory

Setting the terms for power debates was influenced by Dahl's (1957) view of power: "some people have more power than others is one of the most palpable facts of human existence" (p. 201). Dahl offers what he calls an

“intuitive idea of power” according to which “A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do” (1957, p. 202-203). In this approach, power is understood as a product of conflicts between actors to determine who wins and who loses on key issues, in a relatively open system in which there are established decision-making arenas. If certain voices are absent in the debate, their non-participation is interpreted as their own apathy, not as a process of exclusion from the political process (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2002). This one-dimensional view of power involves a focus on behavior in the making of decisions on issues over which there is an observable conflict of subjective interests and attributed to those who prevail in decision making situations (Lukes, 2005).

Bachrach and Baratz (1963) challenged Dahl’s view; they widen the scope by stating that the dominant can influence the subordinate not only by prevailing in the event of manifest conflict, but also by preventing conflict from arising at all. The powerful, through failure to hear or respond to the expressed demands of the powerless, or alternately through less direct mechanisms, such as the laws of anticipated reactions, or the mobilization of bias, can limit the scope of decision making to safe issues, that is, to those that pose no challenge to the status quo. Further, Bachrach and Baratz (1975) discuss how powerful actors use their communities’ dominant myths, values, and institutions to their political advantage, and, in exercising power, they shape and reinforce these “rules of the game” (p. 902).

This two dimensional view of power argues that as a result of his behavioral approach, Dahl's view of power fails to acknowledge that power can be yielded indirectly through the ability to limit what is brought into the public decision making process. The two dimensional view allows for consideration of the ways in which decisions are prevented from being taken on potential issues over which there is an observable conflict of subjective interests (Lukes, 2005). Their analysis of power relations incorporates the question of the control of the agenda, mobilizing the bias of the system, determining which issues are key issues and excluding those which threaten the interests of the powerful.

While the second dimension of power contributed to understanding the ways in which power operates to prevent grievances from entering the public arenas, it maintained the idea that the exercise of power must involve conflict between the powerful and the powerless over clearly recognized grievances. This approach was challenged by Lukes (1974) who suggested that perhaps "the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent such conflict from rising in the first place" (p. 24).

Lukes (2005) debate argues that power not only influences whether social actors behave as they want, and determines whether they participate in politics to express their preferences, but also shapes the ways in which they perceive their wants, desires, and interests. Lukes (1974) asks: "Is it not the most supreme and most insidious exercise of power to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and

preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things?” (p. 24).

Lukes (2005) articulates a radical view of power in that, unlike the other two views of power, it takes into account how social structures function to maintain the interests of certain groups over and against the expresses and latent interests of other groups in society. Lukes three dimensional view of power allows that power may operate to shape and modify desires and beliefs in a manner contrary to people’s interests.

It involves a critique of the behavioral focus of the first two views as too individualistic and allows for consideration of the many ways in which potential issues are kept out of politics, whether through the operation of social forces and institutional practices or through individual decisions. This can also occur in the absence of actual, observable conflict, which may have been successfully averted though there remains here an implicit reference to potential conflict. This potential may never in fact be actualized. What one may have here is a latent conflict, which consists in a contradiction between the interests of those exercising power and the real interests of those they exclude; always focused on particular domains of experience. This view maintains that peoples’ wants themselves be a product of a system that works against their interests and in such cases relates the latter to what they would want and prefer were they able to make the choice (Lukes, 2005).

In this approach, the control of knowledge as a way of influencing consciousness is critical to the exercise of power, with power resembling

Gramscian notions of “hegemony.” As defined by Gramsci (1971), hegemony is the process through which dominant groups impose their conception of reality on all subordinate groups. Hegemony is most encompassing when a dominant ideology reflects and is expressed in everyday experience and in a range of social practices and structures in society.

The “three faces” of power debate is not about the underlying conception of power. Rather, it represents disagreement over the way in which power presents itself and is expressed and maintained in social relationships. For Lukes, as with Dahl and Bachrach and Baratz, power is expressed in the ability of an individual or groups to fulfill their interests when they conflict with the interests of others. All three dimensions of power focus on the repressive side of power, and conceptualize power as a resource that individuals gain, hold and yield (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2002). However, their framework has been critiqued from a number of differing perspectives that have expanded beyond the three dimensional view.

Alternative Frameworks for Understanding Power

Several attempts have been made to demystify and reveal alternative conceptions of power. Power is seen as an individual, collective and political force that can either undermine or empower people and their organizations. It is a force that alternatively can facilitate, hasten, or halt the process of change promoted through advocacy. There is a continuous process of resistance and challenge by the less powerful and marginalized sections of society, resulting in various degrees of change in the structure of power. When these challenges

become extensive enough, they can result in the total transformation of a power structure. These alternative views add new voices to this ongoing debate.

Rita Hayward and “defacing power.” Building on work by Foucault, others have come to see power as productive and relational. In this view, power becomes “a multiplicity of force relations” (Foucault, 1979, p. 92) that constitutes social relationships. It exists only through action and is immanent in all spheres, rather than being exerted by one individual or group over another (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2002).

Recent work by Hayward draws on Foucault to argue for “defacing power” by reconceptualizing it as “a network of social boundaries that constrain and enable action for all actors” (1998, p. 2). She argues that freedom is the capacity to act on these boundaries “to participate effectively in shaping the boundaries that define for them the field of what is possible” (1998, p. 12). This shifts the analysis of power only from resources that “A” holds or uses, to include other broader ways in which spheres of action and possibility are delimited. If power is shaped by discourse, then questions of how discourses are formed, and how they shape the fields of action, become critical for changing and affecting power relations (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2002).

Her case for defacing power argues against thinking of power as implying an account of freedom in which action is independently chosen but in favor of defining it as a network of boundaries that delimit for all the field of what is socially possible. Hayward (1998) advances a direct challenge to Lukes’ view and to the power debate generally. Her point is to deny that power is distributed

among agents and to argue, instead, that it operates impersonally by shaping “the field of the possible.”

This approach recognizes that no human relationship is exempt from a power component. In so far as power affects the field of what is possible, then power affects both the relatively powerful and the relatively powerless. From this perspective, power “involves any relationship involving two or more actors positioned such that one can act within or upon power’s mechanisms to shape the field of action of the other” (Hayward, 1998, p. 15).

Hayward (1998) continues to argue that social practices should be central to the study of power relations, because it is through practices that people order their lives together, permeating them with meaning, significant, and value. Key boundaries include those that define and delimit the ways people can-and the ways they cannot-act, define themselves, think, reason, and desire, which are socially recognized and valued. This includes the institutional mechanisms that distribute the rights and resources needed to support and sustain practices.

Defacing power expands the field of what researcher might study to include any patterned asymmetries in the ways power’s mechanisms shape what is socially possible. Expanding the definition of social power makes it necessary to modify the grounds for criticizing power relations. Hayward argues that those relations that prevent or discourage participants from acting in ways that affect their constitutive boundaries to action should be criticized. Such criticism requires asking whether a given power relation enables all whose action it affects to participate in determining the norms that comprise it.

Hayward (1998) envisions a continuum of power relations on which domination forms one end point. At the opposite end would be the fluid power relation defined by social boundaries that are known and understood by all participants, and that allow them the maximum possible space for effective action upon the boundaries themselves. If freedom is a democratic capacity to participate in shaping the limits that define what is socially possible, the greater the restriction upon freedom within a given power relation, the more the relation approximates a state of domination.

Hayward (1998) recognizes that power relations occur at every level and sphere, affecting the powerful as well as the powerless. This broader approach to power includes the more positive aspects through which power enables action, as well as how it delimits it. If power is the capacity to act upon boundaries that affect one's life, to broaden those boundaries does not always mean to de-limit those of others. Challenging the boundaries of the possible may in some cases mean that those with relatively less power, working collaboratively with others, have more, while in other cases it may direct conflict between the powerful and powerless (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2002).

Rather than seeing PAR as only a tool for mobilizing the powerless against the powerful, this approach makes a more subtle difference by exploring how PAR methods can facilitate change at multiple levels, among multiple actors. Conflicts of interests and views will be present within and between levels; however it is to suggest that to change the boundaries of the possible means to bring about change in multiple spaces and arenas, and to link those processes of

change through new and accountable forms of interconnection (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2002).

Feminist influence. Many versions of critiquing power do so without noticing the feminist perspective of power. When searching for alternative views of power, it is important to look at the feminist influence on PAR and understanding of power. PAR and the feminist views are both built on a sharply political analysis of power relations and the affirmation that significant social change occurs only if power has changed hands and reduced the oppression (Greenwood & Levin, 1998). Both deal with many of the same issues: a critique of positivism, an analysis of power relations, a respect for the knowledge of the silenced, a critique of canonical positions, and a focus on transformative praxis (Greenwood & Levin, 1998). Feminist views also identify subtle forms of oppression and imbalance, and teach us to “address questions about whose interests are regarded as worthy of debate” (Steiner, 1991, p. 158).

Maguire (1987) speaks to the combination of feminism and participation by articulating a combination of feminist agendas, participatory research practice, and the personal experiential dimension of her work. Lather (1991) argues that the principal contributions of feminism have been critique of positivism, the demonstration that all forms of inquiry are value laden, opening up the possibility of a critical social science, pressing for the politics of empowerment, and rising to the challenges of postmodernism. Fine (1992) links feminism, organizational systems, and social activism. A number of examples she provides move feminist research in the direction of co-generative inquiry aimed at social change.

Feminism raises issues of voice and silence; multiple identities and the web of oppressions; gender and gendering mechanisms; using everyday experience as a source of knowledge; challenging power; and understanding that knowledge is always created in the context of human relationships. Feminist views have deepened our understanding of power and relationships; it refuses to deal with power in cognitive terms only. The issue is how people can become empowered themselves instead. The dominant understanding of power is grounded in non-mutuality; it is interventionist power, exercised competitively and seeking control. In feminist views, power is relational, characterized by mutuality rather than sovereignty (Christians, 2005).

Feminists routinely deal with oppression and silencing; they have developed a powerful commitment to a view from below, to hear the voices of the silenced, and to bring these voices to the table (Mies, 1990). Dialogue is the key element in an emancipatory strategy that liberates rather than imprisons us in manipulation. Although traditional views on power consider mutuality a weakness, the feminist view maximizes our humanity and banishes powerlessness. In the research process, power is unmasked and engaged through solidarity as a co-researcher team. There is certainly no monologic “assumption that the researcher is giving the group power” (Denzin, 2003, p. 243).

A key feminist influence has been restructuring the power dynamics of the research process itself. The feminist impetus to redefine power and its manifestations in research emerged from lived experiences. Through reflexivity,

feminist researchers critiqued and changed their own research practices, particularly regarding the nature and processes of empowerment (Maguire, 2002). Empowering approaches advocated by feminist theorists put new demands on researchers (Reinharz, 1992) as well as on participants (Maguire, 1996). Feminist inspired research challenges us to consider how we create spaces for all voices to be heard, as well as how we use our voices to unsettle power differentials wherever encountered (Maguire, 2002).

Freire inspired the poor to hope that they could have a voice in making life decisions. Through dialogue, Freire (1970) argues, the oppressed are able to actually experience their world, and as a result question it. In turn, "the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed" can be accomplished: "to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well" (p. 20). Dialogue is the key element in changing the balance of power using emancipatory strategies that liberate rather than imprison. For Friere, power is a central notion in social analysis. From his own dialogic perspective, Friere speaks of the need to reinvent the meaning of power:

For me, the principal, real transformation, the radical transformation of society . . . demands not getting power from those who have it today, or merely to make some reforms, some changes in it The question . . . is not to take power but to reinvent it. That is, to create a different kind of power, to deny the need power has as if it were metaphysics, bureaucratized, anti-democratic. (Evans & Kennedy, 1987, p. 229)

Summary

This review of the literature on power surfaced challenges to the notion of power as dominance. Alternative views suggest that involving all social actors in defining problems and weighing alternative solutions provides opportunities to share power. Research also suggests that for meaningful interaction and dialogue to occur, the inclusion of multiple voices is necessary so that the possibilities of democratizing action and change can occur. Participatory processes are the best way for people to ensure their own needs and interests will be voiced and will not be dominated by other interests (Young, 1990). This approach challenges us to share power and decision making in order that the less powerful voices can be fairly heard. This can lead to the transformation of power relationships in the direction of greater democracy.

Despite efforts to share power, there continues to be strong structural or systemic phenomena that exclude people from participating in determining their actions or the conditions of their actions. Even in a process in which the co-generation of knowledge is the explicit goal, differences of power and privilege maintain a hold on all human interactions (Brydon-Miller, 2004). This dissertation responds to the call for more alternative ways to address power imbalances, and has relevance for other communities who want to develop grass root efforts for local discussion and decision-making.

Ethical Challenges When Conducting Participatory Action

Research Within University Settings

Carrying out this PAR dissertation in a university setting brought many complexities to the surface and has led to a literature review on the ethical challenges brought out by the IRB's influence on PAR. A current literature review on these ethical challenges suggests that PAR researchers and IRBs continue to grapple with these issues, causing significant gaps in best way to examine ethics with this type of research (Boser, 2006).

With the strong emergence of participatory approaches in social research in the past two decades there has been an expansion of different types of relationships in research and along with it, a new set of ethical challenges (Boser, 2006). The self-evident character of ethics is not in dispute; however, the meaningful application of it is at the center of much debate. Punch (1994) reflects the general conclusion that codes of ethics should serve as a guideline prior to fieldwork but not intrude on full participation. "A strict application of codes" may "restrain and restrict" a great deal of "innocuous" and "unproblematic" research (p. 90).

Review of literature suggests that participatory researchers adapt one of two approaches to address challenges. Strong positions have been taken throughout the literature representing, on one hand, radical approaches for these changes to occur, to the other hand, of a more participatory, dialogic style when engaged with the IRBs to examine and acknowledge these contradictions.

In this section I present a brief overview of the history of IRB's stance on ethics in research, followed by some of the key themes around ethical challenges with PAR highlighted in the literature such as relationship between PAR and IRBs, power relations within ethical dilemmas, and risks and benefits for human subjects.

Brief Historical Overview of Institutional Review Boards

IRBs are federally mandated ethics committees that were created with positivistic research designs in mind to evaluate research proposals. The Nuremburg Code (1949) was the first major international expression of principles that set out to protect the rights of people from research abuse, but there are other significant agreements such as the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki Agreement of 1964 and the establishment of U.S. National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects in Biomedical and Behavioral Research in 1978. From this, the Belmont Report was developed and adopted in 1979 as the standard for overseeing U.S. Public Health Service grants and contracts. These federal regulations and ethics guidelines were soon extended to cover all federally funded research with human subjects. The three principles developed from the Belmont Report served as the moral standards for research involving human subjects are respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. These principles reiterate the basic themes of value-neutral experimentalism-- individual autonomy, maximum benefits with minimal risks, and ethical ends exterior to scientific means (Christians, 2005).

The primary purpose of IRB review is to ensure that the rights of human subjects are protected by conducting a risk vs. benefit analysis of proposed research, ensuring that informed consent and confidentiality protocols are applied appropriately, and that the selection of participants is just and equitable. The standard model of informed consent consists of three components: the subject's agreement to participate is (a) informed, (b) competent, and (c) voluntary (President's Commission, 1982).

According to Pritchard (2002), IRB members rely on the regulatory definition of research, which emphasizes the purpose of directing the activity in question. Activities count as research to an IRB only if the activity undertaken reflects a deliberate objective of discovering or learning something new that transcends the particular activity. Research concerns revolve around the organized search for knowledge applicable to other similar phenomena: Research means a systematic investigation, including research development, testing, and evaluation designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge (34 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), 97.102(d)).

A research activity's design reflects a data collection approach conventionally used by members of a community whose mission includes the search for knowledge. The search for this objective may be knowledge purely for its own sake or for some practical end. Because the IRB's purpose is to ensure the protection of human subjects, a research activity only falls within the IRB's purview if it involves human subjects as follows: Human subject means a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student)

conducting research obtains (1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or (2) identifiable private information (34 CFR 97.102 (f)).

In its conceptual structure, IRB policy is designed to guarantee the protection of human subjects by assuring that participants give informed consent and that their confidentiality will be protected. It also carefully considers the risk from harm and weighs this against the potential benefits of the research. This worldview of IRBs is bound by ethical regulations designed to govern conduct within well-defined principles that have been imbedded in international agreements and national laws. Their work and their values have been shaped by the conditions of former times and must be understood within a broader historical, political, and social context in which the value-free ideas developed.

Relationship Between Participating Action Research and Institutional Review Board

While accepting and understanding the need for IRBs, it is clear that these rules do not conceptualize research in participatory or collaborative formats (Christians, 2005). The definition of research has not changed to fit newer models of inquiry. It has become necessary to challenge the current framework as it is not appropriate for examining the ethics of PAR. PAR researchers have begun to question the ability of traditional positivist research to bring about social reform and are challenging the assumptions of objectivity and neutrality, and actively interrogating the role that privilege and power play in shaping PAR research agendas and outcomes (Brydon-Miller, 2002).

PAR projects appear to present an entirely different kind of problem for IRBs. Open-ended, collaborative, methodologically eclectic, and without specific methods, processes or final goals determined in advance, PAR seems to be an open invitation to legal and financial disasters for universities; some U.S. university IRBs have responded by denying permission for PAR to be carried out at all (Brydon-Miller & Greenwood, 2006). The most prominent effects of increased IRB scrutiny has been the multiple reviews of projects that utilize PAR methods in the subjects' own setting. The slightest error in protocol can now have the effect of preventing some PAR projects to begin at all (Lincoln, 2005).

PAR brings new sets of social relations for research (Boser, 2006) and we can no longer continue to try to adapt the current ethical practices of conventional research to PAR. The ethical requirements laid down by existing authorities may apply very well to conventional research, but with these more deeply engaged types of research, PAR researchers find more and more new ethical challenges arising (Rowan, 2002).

Brydon-Miller and Greenwood (2006) believe PAR holds out much more important guarantees for the ethical treatment of human subjects than conventional research because it is built on voluntary partnership between a researcher and local stakeholders. A collaborative team is formed and determines the subject and methods of the work, learns and applies the methods together, analyzes outcomes, designs and implements actions rising from the process, and together determine representations of the process. Democratic collaboration, co-generation of knowledge, and a commitment to the

democratization of human situations are the major guidelines that PAR follows and so it stands to reason that the interests of the human subjects involved would be respected with care throughout the process.

Several authors suggest that IRB documentation and protocol privilege specific research practices (Milne, 2005). Several aspects of the IRB serve a hegemonic function, privileging some voices and marginalizing others. These authors highlight the emerging contradictions of this documentation when applied to PAR and argue that there needs to be an ongoing dialogue to examine and acknowledge these contradictions in their documentation. Greenwood and Levin (2005) discuss the responsibility of scholars to do work that is socially meaningful and socially responsible. In order to accomplish this transformation, they believe changes must occur in relationships and between researchers, universities, and society.

Dialogue needs to move toward finding a way to support IRBs becoming more aware of the new interpretive and qualitative developments in the social sciences. One approach is to re-conceptualize science as a collaborative, communicative, communitarian, context-centered, moral project (Greenwood & Levin, 2005). This is an evolving ethical framework that recovers the moral values excluded by the value-free inquiry. Through dialogue there is hope of promoting a more constructive understanding of the parties involved with the goal of improving future encounters between them.

Ethics of Care

In research where the researcher and the other participants become much closer and are more deeply involved with one another, the social and personal implications become more complex. Human beings involved in a PAR process are located in intricate historical, political and cultural spaces. Ethical statements by people concerned with such areas of research start to talk about interpersonal ethics--the care with which one treats another equal person--and social ethics, the concern with the results of one's research and the unintended consequences which may follow. This kind of research actually makes a difference to the people involved and to ensure that mistakes are not made is a duty (Rowan, 2002).

An outgrowth of feminist theories of caring and connection expresses itself as a form of ethics, the first principle of which is the interconnectedness of human life, respect for others, dignity, concern for the welfare of others, and solidarity. The commitment to community or caring concern has begun to dissolve the old borders between knowledge producing and knowledge consuming elites, and the communities in which they study. The new bonds forming now are those between researchers and the communities with which they work; the new knowledge is knowledge for understanding how to enable democratic action and greater social equality (Lincoln, 2002).

Carol Gilligan (1982, 1983, 1988) characterizes the female moral voice as an ethic of care. This dimension of moral development is rooted in the primacy of human relationships. Compassion and nurturance resolve conflicting

responsibilities among people, and as such these standards are totally opposite of merely avoiding harm. Newer positions on an ethic of care go beyond a focus of personal relationships in the private sphere to concerns with the just community and the potential for transforming society in the public sphere (Seigfried, 1996).

A new set of ethical mandates is needed for researchers as they interact with the communities during their research. The Helsinki Protocols, which most of the Western social science establishment's use, are viewed as inadequate, if not undermining the purposes of community research. Such formalistic protocols do not go nearly far enough in the intimate, face-to-face, democratic work of PAR in meeting the ethical needs of either researchers or researched (Lincoln, 2002). Consequently, researchers are revising the codes, working through intricate and interlocking relationships toward honest and authentic relationships based on trust and caring (Christians, 2000; Denzin, 2000).

Rubin and Rubin (1995) distinguish between legal compliance with human subjects protection requirements and conscientious ethical behavior:

You cannot achieve ethical research by following a set of pre-established procedures that will always be correct. Yet, the requirement to behave ethically is just as strong in qualitative interviewing as in other types of research on humans—maybe even stronger. You must build ethical routine into your work. You should carefully study codes of ethics and cases of unethical behavior to sensitize yourself to situations in which ethical commitments become particularly salient. Throughout your

research, keep thinking and judging what are your ethical obligations. (p. 96)

PAR is the only modality of research that starts with the premise that social research is not a right of researchers but a duty and a process of taking on obligations for the welfare of the non-professional collaborators. The entire PAR relationship is based on active co-determination and no action can be taken without agreement among the collaborators. It is hard to imagine a research process with greater human subjects' protection (Greenwood, 2002).

PAR holds out much more important guarantees for the ethical treatment of human subjects than does conventional research because it is built on democratic collaboration, co-generation of knowledge, and a commitment to the democratization of human situations as the major guidelines that PAR follows; it stands to reason that the interests of the human subjects involved would be respected with care throughout the process (Brydon-Miller & Greenwood, 2006).

Power relations within ethical dilemmas. Boser (2006) explores the importance of maintaining a focus on issues of power and calls upon us to consider how these relations of power might influence practice. At the core of the discussions is the issue of power and the voiceless within the academic and political structure itself. Hierarchies and power relations are everywhere in the system and we can learn more about power through deliberate, systematic efforts to alter power relations.

Within academia, there is an existing map for the way research gets accomplished; it tells us how to stay the course and navigate the prescribed

route. A part of the expectation for students as researchers within the academy, e.g., students in pursuit of PhDs is that they uncover/discover this road map and successfully navigate its prescribed route. This conceptual map provides legitimacy for the power and control exerted by the IRB on the research processes coming before them for approval. It insulates the academy from external forces of change, including the needs of community that are external to the university (Boser, Feroz, & Welliver, 2003).

How to view PAR within this conceptual map is unclear in the university structure. There are strongly held, differing positions about PAR when it comes to approving protocol. These differences have remained unaddressed for a variety of reasons; there is no negotiated set of values to work from which make it difficult for students to find the space within the academy to engage in action research.

Participation itself challenges existing hierarchies and power relations. PAR is about recognizing and orchestrating the power we have collectively for our mutual benefit (Greenwood, 2003). PAR researchers need to be willing to enter into arguments at the centers of power where the rules are made by forwarding better arguments and examples. They also must learn to trust the process' ability to evoke the energy necessary for change and work quietly to achieve small differences at appropriate points rather than be a heroic minority in a world that opposes PAR work (Greenwood, 2004). Participatory approaches need to be embraced as a way to build greater voice, accountability and trust into

relationships between PAR and universities. It becomes a vehicle for narrowing the gap among all participants who share goals of social transformation.

According to Greenwood (2002), universities are currently under unparalleled public pressure to engage with communities and this provides an opportunity to use this pressure to open universities to address the barriers around ethical issues by bringing them to the surface and seeking ways to advance a participatory learning process. Greenwood (2002) suggests using this crisis by taking PAR to the centers of power to express dissatisfaction with conventional science by demonstrating the strong ethical values of PAR. Greenwood (2003) believes there has to be a correspondence between the “opening” in the institutional set-up and the openness of character and process within this space. This means not assuming what the other wants and had, but engaging in an inquiry that insists on treating all the collaborators as partners in a process of change and as people with strengths and weaknesses that cannot be discounted.

PAR requires individuals to work with groups in a completely egalitarian manner. The particular structure of the IRBs makes it difficult for them to put aside power, status and prestige, and work with individuals and groups on an equal footing. It takes a particular form of humility to comprehend that all human beings share a common destiny, and that social change can only be effected through a faith that equality and democracy are in the interest of all human beings, not just those with the status of educational and social attainment (Lincoln, 2002)

Further, a key component of PAR is to maintain ethical treatment of participants. PAR researchers do not characterize their participants as subjects but as co-researchers. Research participants are not to be seen as a means to an end; PAR does not see people as passive subjects to be manipulated (Reinharz, 1981). The relationship is one that is reciprocal in nature, as researchers too, contribute an equally valuable perspective. This approach deviates from the expert model found in traditional research. PAR seeks to share power in knowledge generation and decision-making based on that knowledge. This possibility of human relationships within the research context is a notion that is anathema to traditional positivist research, but central to the work of PAR (Brydon-Miller & Greenwood, 2006). The key to distinguishing between caring and coercion in the context of a close, on-going, collaborative relationship is to be cognizant of the power and privilege we carry with us into our interactions with research participants, and at the same time not allow these concerns to immobilize us in working for social change (Brydon-Miller, 2004).

Risks vs. benefits. Smith (2005) and Bishop (2005) argue that collectivity we must determine what are the costs and benefits for participating in research. A cost-benefit model of inquiry does injustice to the empowering, participatory model of research that many are now advocating. PAR seeks to avoid harm and bring about some good to the participants; it seeks to improve the quality of life or change a surrounding environment for the better (DeTardo-Bora, 2004).

Critical reflection on the potential risks for all participants must be weighed against the potential benefits. Potential benefits include those that may be

realized from the action anticipated to result from the research project (Boser, 2006). Beyond that, a potential exists for increased democratization within the set of social relations for the research team as a consequence of participating in PAR (Boser, 2001; Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001). Furthermore, participants often develop a new skill set and sense of agency through involvement in PAR. These capacities include broadened and strengthened networks, skills in collaboration, research skills, enhanced knowledge about their local environment, and skills in advocating for social change (Boser, 2006). Efforts to minimize the likelihood of harm to human subjects by severely limiting the kinds of research that can be done, the questions that can be asked, and the types of individuals involved in the research, can, as the results of these limitations, have the effect of making all social research completely impotent in terms of addressing issues of real importance (Brydon-Miller & Greenwood, 2006).

Attention to ethical codes. Scholars need a new set of moral and ethical research protocols. They are being shaped by the feminist, communitarian principles of sharing, reciprocity, relationality, community, and neighborliness (Denzin, 1995). They embody a dialogic ethic of love and faith, grounded in compassion (Bracci & Christians, 2002; West, 1993). Accordingly, the purpose of research is not the production of new knowledge per se. Rather the purposes are pedagogical, political, moral, and ethical, involving the enhancement of moral discernment, a commitment to praxis, justice, an ethic of resistance, and a performative pedagogy that resist oppression (Christians, 2002). PAR, as practiced, is often simultaneously pulled in opposite directions, both toward

standards set by externally based, academic research, and toward internal indigenous standard, creating ethical dilemmas. But PAR can hardly let go of the indigenous standards without losing its soul and become mainstream research (Eikeland, 2006).

There are some perspectives that state trying to resolve the troubled relationship between PAR and conventional social sciences is not worth the effort (Reason, Dick, & Shotter, 2004). As long as PAR is linked to the unresolved struggle for ordinary people to get control over their lives and conditions are hostile to this kind of transformation, PAR will always be involved in a battle for space and recognition in universities (Shotter, 2004). Dick (2004) sees PAR as institutionally marginalized, in the sense that social action is generally external to the academy and, the implication is, it is, not well situated to defend itself institutionally. For those who remain committed to combining research with service to the community, and with real concerns about the nature of participation and collaboration, the decision has been to head out of the university, choosing to build an effective relationship with the community instead. The realities of participatory work with communities appear to be at odds with the realities of the universities.

There are many ethical issues that PAR must address if as a community of scholars/practitioners, we are to live up to this shared set of values (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, & Eikeland, 2006). Optimal ethical standards in PAR may not be achieved until the local community itself evolves into a learning community on its own terms, and, consequently, the collaborating academic institution starts

seeing itself as one of the learning stakeholders instead of the “expert authority and powerful” partner (Barazangi, 2006). In doing so, we have begun to create a space to engage communities as equal partners in the consideration of other ways of understanding the world, and of effecting change.

Summary

Through this review of the literature, research suggests a need for equitably involving all partners in the research process through defining problems and weighing alternative solutions. Yet there continue to be barriers in extending this type of research to grassroots efforts. This dissertation responds to those challenges, and has relevance to many communities working toward providing meaning and value for local stakeholders in their efforts to strengthen their voices.

However, this research has implications for others as well. The research findings and process has the potential to enhance knowledge about the dynamics of power in relationships along with addressing the need for PAR to establish stronger ethical guidelines for doing PAR research within university settings. If successful, this project could be relevant in finding alternative options for universities to come to the table as collaborating partners seeking solutions to a new set of moral and ethical research protocols.

CHAPTER THREE

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

While the objective of this PAR project was to develop a long term measurement tool for Early Head Start, this dissertation focused on examining how the principles of PAR affected the contributions of voice for the co-researchers who participated in the project. The following section presents a PAR framework and discusses its potential to engage Early Head Start mothers in critical dialogue during the development of this project. To ensure the usefulness of the research for the Early Head Start community, co-researchers needed significant involvement in the research. Also the research project needed to be relevant to their needs and the experiences of the community. Throughout this discussion about a PAR approach, I argue its appropriateness within this framework and conclude my rationale by discussing its compatibility with the Early Head Start project. Having developed this foundation, I discuss the particular questions this dissertation explored, the methods utilized, validity, and a review of quality assurances most pertinent to this study.

Participatory Action Research Framework

We embarked on a PAR project with the clear understanding that this was not just “a particular set of arrangements but a process of continuous change” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 178), and ensured a perspective of creating knowledge and meaning that was intimately tied to a deeper need to make individual and social

change. This research was exploratory, and the methodology and position from which I proceeded, was designed to focus attention on the individual and collective dialogue of the Early Head Start mothers.

The PAR project provided many opportunities for Early Head Start mothers to engage in an emergent learning process guided by the dialectical experience, thus leading to the development of critical consciousness. This dialogue is not a mere technique in the research process, but something that Freire (Shor & Freire, 1987) believes “must be understood as something taking part in the very historical nature of human beings” (p.13).

This dialogue setting that Freire created is contingent upon human beings engaging in a process of transformation that can only be achieved with a commitment to change. For this transformation to occur, within individuals and groups, Freire (1970, 1973) proposes a methodology for learning, which is participatory and egalitarian in nature, and which I found suitable for this study. Freire’s authentic dialogic ideas, with its emphasis on inquiry, shared knowledge creation, and open communication between researcher and participants’ relationship were applied to this PAR design.

Feminist research and the Freirean philosophy emphasize this raising of consciousness occurring when spaces are created whereupon “inquiry is pried open, inviting intellectual surprises to flourish” (Fine, 1992, p. 22). The co-researchers and I are assumed to have knowledge and expertise valuable to the research project. Our input and the dialogue between us enhanced the authenticity and utility of the research findings.

Therefore, this PAR dissertation is framed by: (1) the critical dialogue of the participants; (2) the prominence of action; and, (3) the subjectivity and active stance of the researcher. These characteristics encourage transformative change by creating collaborative relationships that engage in critical dialogue and reflective practices. They provoked possibilities for Early Head Start mothers and me to engage in experiences that require questioning assumptions that are enacted in their daily lives. By telling stories of our experiences, others were able to see the assumptions on which we were operating. Within a context of dialogue and shared risk-taking, researchers can “critique what seems natural, spin images of what’s possible, and engage in questions of how to move from here to there” (Fine, 1992, p. 220).

The first characteristic, the critical dialogue of the participants, relates to the development of critical consciousness through the lived experiences of the participants within this project. This consciousness-raising experience created an opportunity for the voices of all the participants to be heard and valued. Thus, these participants became researchers about their daily lives, posed problems that rose from the complexities around their own meaning of voice and power, and began strategizing ways for making meaning out of their individual/collective experiences as Early Head Start mothers.

Engaging in critical dialogue is empowering and transformative because, through the process of dialogue, people become “masters of their own thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades” (Friere, 1972, p. 95). This

PAR methodology “stresses the importance of human subjectivity and consciousness in knowledge creation” (Maguire, 1987, p. 19). In documenting the lived experiences of these Early Head Start mothers through dialogues, new possibilities emerged for me as a researcher, and for us, as co-researchers, in constructing knowledge about voice and power by making use of the principles of PAR throughout the project.

The second characteristic which informed this research emphasized social action, a characteristic inherent in PAR. Studying voice and power with Early Head Start mothers broke the silence about who Early Head Start mothers are and how they positioned themselves in relation to their program, staff, and community. It challenged deeply embedded assumptions about the Self and Other, while “seeking to unearth, interrupt, and open new frames for intellectual and political theory and change” (Fine, 1992, p. 220). PAR is a form of research that generates knowledge claims for the express purpose of taking action to promote social change and social analysis.

Also within this paradigm, I acknowledged my own social position, a third characteristic within this framework and one that is explored in more detail in the next section. The complexity of my roles needed to be acknowledged along with how these multiple positions impacted the research process. These multiple positions intersected and brought conflict during the progression of this research with the agency where I worked and the university where I am a doctoral student. I have an obligation to interrogate these multiple positionalities in relation to the research study. By making explicit the tensions experienced as a researcher in

varying roles and statuses, I have the possibility of adding new dimensions to the complexities involved with multiple positions, but also I can avoid the blindspots that come with unexamined beliefs. One of PAR's central concerns is with matters of relationships; therefore clarity about the different roles was necessary for thinking through the issues of research validity as well as research ethics.

Researcher's Position

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the instrument (Patton, 2002). The credibility of the qualitative methods used hinge to a great extent on skills, competence, and rigor doing fieldwork, as well as any personal and professional experiences that affect the data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the findings. I purposefully use a first person active voice in my writing to be transparent around my assumptions and values as they affect the inquiry. It is important for me to own my perspective and take seriously the responsibility to communicate authentically the perspectives of those I encountered during this inquiry. I also need to acknowledge my biases and limitations and actively reflect on how my position affected my findings in this study.

I saw my role in this research process as a facilitator, but also as a stakeholder wanting to help improve the situation of Early Head Start families in our county. I cared deeply about the success of this program and have a strong belief in the abilities of families to surmount adversity and begin the climb toward transformation and growth.

Background. I was born in 1950, the oldest of six children in a Catholic family in rural Pennsylvania. Both of my parents had a high school education.

My father struggled with maintaining employment due to health problems and my mother was a stay-at-home mom until she began working at age 35 to provide income to meet the needs of our family. After fourth grade, I attended Catholic grade school and high school. I received my Bachelor's Degree in Education from an all female Catholic College, Mercyhurst College. I was the only one of my siblings to attend Catholic schools. Despite living in poverty, my mother miraculously found ways to access money for me to receive this education. Her message to me was that education was powerful and would be the way I could lead a life different from hers. While my mother struggled in many ways in her lifetime, her belief that education would lead me to a different life than hers was a profound gift that gave me so many more choices that weren't available to her.

My college years began in the late 1960's when many significant changes were occurring in our society. These changes had a profound effect on me, especially in regards to social injustice. I married in my senior year of college and received my Master's in Education shortly after the birth of our third child. My career choices were pulled in the direction of working with those in difficult life situations. I've actively worked with families in human service systems for over 25 years. In fact my very first job, at age 16, was as a teacher-aide for a new federally funded program called Head Start.

Relationships. I chose to do a PAR project because I wanted to make a difference. Because of my investment in human services over the years, I have

a certain understanding of the problems in this field and, as a result, I have built a strong rapport with the key stakeholders in this sector throughout my county.

An especially important aspect of PAR is building relationships with the participants. My experience growing up in poverty in this community gave me credibility and connections with the Early Head Start mothers. I believe a factor in our ever-growing relationship was a sense of shared history and identity. I assumed an empathetic understanding of the co-researchers and their worlds as I also understood how they defined their situations.

On many occasions, I made it known to the young mothers who were my co-researchers that I grew up in one of the poor sections of town and how I often assumed the shame back then so associated with my neighborhood “Oh, so you’re from there,” they would say. I also heard what they didn’t say, “You’re no good if you live in that neighborhood.” Even though living in these conditions occurred in the past, I believe that their knowledge of my childhood circumstances served as a bridge for our relationships.

I share similar points of entry into this study of power and voice with the co-researchers. We all share characteristics that profoundly shape our life experience: white females who are mothers raised in poverty, and the memories of these struggles remain engraved at a deep inner level. Due to these shared similarities I experienced moments of unspoken connections with them.

I am disheartened that their needs continue to go unfulfilled. It is the persistence of such material and human injustices along with the awareness of many structural constraints and realities operating in their lives that moves me to

employ a PAR project that is rooted in changing inequalities. My aim is to make positive change happen, to shift the balance of power.

Multiple positionalities. Doing ethnographic work, I did not see myself as an outsider or expert, but as a participant observer who wore many hats, as I have done over the years working in human services. While this was a difficult task, it was needed to fully understand the complexities of the many situations that emerged during this project. I was a full participant observer throughout the research process. I was present and participated in all aspects of the PAR project so as to capture the lived experiences of the participants. I also monitored for critical events of the study, along with observing patterns of interactions that others may think are unimportant or may not be willing to talk about (Patton, 2002). These observations were shared regularly with the co-researcher team.

I participated from an emic perspective. The ultimate insider perspective comes from involving the insiders as co-researchers through PAR. I observed in an overt manner; the co-researchers had full and complete disclosure regarding how the study was being conducted and had access to what was being written and analyzed.

However, I was both an insider and an outsider. On the one hand, my in-depth experience with Early Head Start provided me, as a researcher, with strong baseline knowledge of the program. My experience growing up in poverty in this community gave me credibility and connections with the co-researchers. Yet at the same time, I was an outsider when seen from the perspective of

academia. I was privileged in that I carried out this research as part of my job and also as a part-time Ph.D. student. Yet paradoxically, I felt more like an outsider in the academy in that I identified more with my working class community and Early Head Start program than with the role of academic researcher. From this position, it was important to me that the research and reports that came from the dissertation be useful to the program and its participants, and lead to improved practices in Early Head Start. It was important for me to take seriously the responsibility to understand the perspectives and concerns of those involved in this process. For me PAR is not only a research methodology, but also a philosophy of life.

In reality, I was a practitioner who became a doctoral student researcher in my organization and encountered ethical review regulations that highlight the contradictions among universities and organizational interests. I also experienced my own contradictions as I too, engaged in understanding my own voice and power. These contradictions, and the complexities of being a participant-researcher, were not resolved within this research project, but they were acknowledged and attended to throughout the experience, and surely influenced the direction of this work. My own assumptions about voice and power formed my thinking and had a profound influence on how I conducted and participated in this research.

A recurring question for me was “how does my race, gender, class, status, and self-interest position me within this process?” This self-examination did not occur without a great deal of struggle. The educator in me accepted,

even valued the struggle. There were no simple answers to understanding the meaning of voice and power, nor were there simple strategies for being a participant-researcher investigating their meaning.

The multiple positionalities of being a practitioner, doctoral student, researcher, and participant-observer manifested themselves at different times throughout the project. At the beginning I felt I could manage these roles along with the requirements imposed on the PAR project by the IRB, while concurrently recognizing the importance of a theoretical framework that valued the multiple contributions of the participants. As a PAR researcher, I was committed to including the participants in all aspects of the research agenda, recognizing that there were certain constraints to the ideal when PAR is conducted in a university setting. The participants did not stand outside their own discourse nor did they become objects for data collection. Unlike the claim of positivism that knowledge can be apprehended “out there,” I believe the participants were active agents in the PAR process and that they provoked possibilities for social change by actively engaging in the construction knowledge. I also recognize that such an engagement is complicated. It required that I grappled with uncertainty, be willing to adjust my roles, accept process over product, and adjust the research lens as the process unfolded.

Impact of Dissertation Chairperson and Committee

In order to conduct an alternative dissertation process, I needed to have a committee that supported my work. I identified four professors at my university that I believed had the expertise needed to guide me through this PAR

dissertation. I met with each one individually to discuss my plans before I made my final decision of committee members. I intentionally chose committee members that were not only aligned to the core values and processes of PAR but who also had a power base within the university to take a stand for me and make a difference if need be during the course of this research. My committee members included the following: 1) the sociology department chairperson, 2) a widely recognized professor, nationally and internationally as well as in the university, especially for his abilities to bring in significant grant monies for his research center affiliated with the university and 3) two professors who had learned PAR during their doctoral studies at Cornell and were both doctoral coordinators at this university, one at the main campus and the other at a branch campus in the state capital. I chose one of the Cornell-trained professors as my chairperson and advisor for the dissertation.

My involvement with my chairperson began in 2002 when she was a new tenure track assistant professor at this university. Her own dissertation at Cornell University was about a community based PAR project, and she promoted an agenda for enhancing and legitimizing PAR in a university setting. Her knowledge and expertise made her keenly aware of the challenges in securing approval for a PAR dissertation. As well, she understood the tensions and challenges that emerged in the process of translating principles of PAR into practice.

This professor was committed to participatory processes and supporting student voice. For instance, she became an active member of the university IRB,

contacting them early on in her tenure in an attempt to create space for PAR at this university. She worked to enhance their awareness of alternative research designs such as that based on critical theory and PAR. She openly addressed barriers along the way and challenged the traditional research protocol. She made efforts to engage the IRB in dialogue around their concerns regarding PAR. For example, she invited me to attend informal meetings with the IRB chair and vice-chair to discuss my plans for a PAR dissertation. This direct engagement with them provided me with an opportunity to understand their worldview. These meetings also gave me a glimpse of the challenges PAR presented to the assumptions and conventions of the traditional university view of dissertation protocol. It was within this context that it became evident that my principles and values resonated strongly with PAR and I became committed to a participatory, inclusive dissertation process.

Having a strong chair and committee proved to be extremely important in the final stages of this dissertation research. Their belief in the importance of the knowledge that emerged from this research served to be crucial when the IRB said the data gathering must stop. They encouraged me then to shift the dissertation to incorporate learnings based on the differing epistemologies with this board. Overall, this has made this a stronger dissertation in that it is about the challenges of doing PAR in a university setting.

Qualitative Inquiry/Ethnography

My research approach was ethnographic, grounded in an epistemology in which knowledge generation is active and context-based, and influenced by the meanings and values that all participants bring to a study. Therefore, I believe the best fit for this dissertation was qualitative inquiry using ethnography. Where research requires accurate portrayals of stakeholder opinions, qualitative, ethnographic data have often proved superior to survey data, particularly in cases that involve long-term field exposure, and in situations where informants might feel at risk or have other reasons to provide incorrect responses, or where their “truer” responses might develop over time (Chambers, 2000). This qualitative inquiry remained open and flexible to permit exploration of the meanings that people involved with Early Head Start constructed, along with how they made sense of their world and their experiences.

A key assumption of ethnography is that by entering into first hand interactions with people in their everyday lives, the researcher can reach a better understanding of their beliefs, motivations, and behaviors than by using any other method (Tedlock, 2000). According to Denzin (1989), an ethnographer will first immerse themselves in the lives of the people and, after achieving a deep understanding of them through rigorous effort, produce a contextualized reproduction and interpretation of the stories told by the people. Ultimately an ethnographic report will present an integrated synthesis of experience and theory. The “final interpretive theory is multivoiced and dialogical. It builds on

native interpretations and in fact simply articulates what is implicit in those interpretations” (Denzin, 1989, p.120).

I was committed to going out and getting close to the activities and everyday experiences of the co-researchers. This immersion helped me see from the inside how they led their lives, how they carried out their daily rounds of activities, and what they found meaningful. In this way immersion gave me access to the fluidity of others’ lives and enhanced my sensitivity to interaction and process (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Immersion in ethnographic research, then, involved both being with other people to see how they responded to events as they happened and experiencing for myself these events and the circumstances that give rise to them.

This ethnographic immersion also means that the purpose of doing this work is not as a detached, neutral observer; rather, it is one where I saw first hand and up close how the Early Head Start mothers dealt with uncertainty and confusion, how meanings emerged through dialogue and collective action, how understandings and interpretations changed over time.

Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) encourage ethnographers to document and write about the multiple voices of local people and their divergent views arising from their various positions and roles. The excerpt strategy used provided an effective way for highlighting dialogues between my voice, the voices of the co-researchers, and others that emerged along the way. Though recorded by me, the voices of the co-researchers can be heard in the excerpts. In the

analytic text, I engaged their voices in various ways, for example, by augmenting them or supplementing them with additional information.

Meaningful construction emerged out of the interactions, but also out of the on-going relationship between us. The concern with the relationship emphasizes one of the defining characteristics of ethnography; the significant time invested in developing, through repeated contacts and multiple interviews over time, a genuine relationship involving mutual respect among us, and mutual interest in the project out of which meaning evolved. The essential core of ethnography is this concern for the meaning of actions and events to the people we seek to understand (Spradley, 1979:5) and my role was to communicate genuinely in both subtle and direct ways that “I want to know what you know in the way that you know it . . . will you become my teacher and help me understand?”(p. 34). I was grounded in a commitment to the first-hand experience and exploration of this particular social setting on the basis of participant observation which remains the characteristic features of the ethnographic approach.

Exploring the complexities of voice and power, and the co-researchers perspectives was extremely complicated and required an analysis that could uncover the myriad of experiences that multiple participants brought to the research project. Ethnography provided an approach to analyzing the data in terms of those complexities. It also made significant my own epistemological, methodological, and theoretical perspectives in the construction of the analytic categories and the interpretations of the dialogue. I chose to immerse myself in

the dialogue of the co-researchers and to engage in a recursive process of analysis and interpretation with the participants of the study.

Co-Researchers: Early Head Start Mothers' Stories

I became deeply engaged in the lives of these four Early Head Start mothers: Mary, Joan, Sara, and Amy (pseudonyms are used throughout this study to protect the identification of the co-researchers). Each became involved in this PAR project with varying reasons but they were united in their desire for Early Head Start to be successful for their children. Their motivation to remain involved was linked to their commitment to make a difference in the lives of other Early Head Start families. Each came equipped with strengths as well as burdens. They experienced multiple stressors in their lives as well as limited resources common for those who live in poverty. The demands of motherhood and financial pressures were struggles they all were familiar with. At the time this PAR project began, three of the co-researchers were policy council members, and the fourth co-researcher's youngest child graduated from Early Head Start. Following is a summary of their individual stories.

Mary, 24, was a former Early Head Start parent who is married and the mother of three children; one daughter, six, and two sons, four and three-years old. She was actively engaged during her involvement in the program as was her husband. They both served terms as president of the Policy Council and were involved members of the Parent Committee. As Mary's confidence and competencies grew, she continued to take on more challenges. She eventually enrolled in the local university and earned an associate degree in Early

Childhood Education. She became an Americore worker and was employed at Community Services for a time. During that time she had the opportunity to fill in as an Early Head Start home visitor while another home visitor was on maternity leave. She returned to college to pursue her Bachelor's Degree.

Joan, 23, is a current Early Head Start parent who is married and the mother of a two-year old son. Joan was in a serious car accident which led to their son's premature birth. The family was referred to Early Intervention and Early Head Start services. Joan has a high school education and is active in the program. She is currently President of the Policy Council and member of the Parent Committee. Joan is supportive of the other mothers and open about sharing her experiences and ideas.

Sara, 19, is a single mother of a two-year old son. She lived with her grandparents for several years and graduated from high school. She took classes at the local community college and became a certified message therapist while in this program. Sara recently moved out on her own and is attempting to balance the demands of motherhood and independent living still as a teenager. Even with all of these demands, she is currently Vice-President of the Policy Council and President of the Parent Committee. She has taken the opportunity to go beyond her specific circumstances and become a member of this PAR project.

Amy, 20, is a single mother of two children; a son who is nine months and a three year old daughter. She currently lives with the father of her daughter. She also graduated from high school. Networking with the other mothers has

been very beneficial to her. Transportation is a major barrier for her and all of the co-researchers make sure she gets to the meetings. Amy became progressively more active in the programs as she took on roles of Secretary/Treasurer of the Policy Council and Vice-President of the Parent committee. Amy has the ability to be very direct and is willing to ask challenging questions as well as participate in discussions.

Throughout their time in the program, these Early Head Start mothers took on increasingly challenging roles and developed leadership qualities. They sought opportunities to grow and change and used the resources made available to them in the program. They demonstrated the ability to build social networks and work together. They capitalized on each others skills and knowledge while fostering trust and friendship along the way. Gradually this level of trust led to sharing more of their struggles and desires as they discovered different avenues for their voices to become more audible.

Research Questions

One of the underlying assumptions about PAR, and one of the tenants of a Freiren methodology, is that problem-posing provides opportunities for knowledge creation and self/collective reflection, which in turn, generates themes and patterns for analysis. This knowledge is created through dialogue and is constructed in the context of the overall PAR process. During the group sessions, the co-researchers engaged in critical dialogue regarding their involvement in several different venues throughout their involvement in this

project: community presentations, seminars, interviews, and focus groups with Early Head Start parents, staff, and collaborative board members.

My initial questions were guides and points of entry into the discussions of power and voice. The primary questions I focused on for the process study were:

1. To what extent and in what ways do the principles of PAR contribute to impacting the strength of local voice in relevant dialogue during the development of this project?
2. How do those who participate in the project perceive that their voice has made a contribution?
3. Explore and examine the interconnections and tensions that emerged between PAR and IRB as experienced by the practitioner/researcher through this dissertation.

In essence, the process of this project itself was the unit of analyses. This dissertation is a case study of a PAR project. The data are elements that give you information about the case. This dissertation represents the story of a PAR project, examining how the process of PAR impacts the strength of local voice using the principals of PAR as a guide. To give voice means to provide a place for the perspectives of people who have previously been marginalized from opportunities to be heard. It means to help articulate voices that have been silenced, to draw people together in conversation when they were not before, and to create space for people to articulate their world in the face of power structures which silence them (Reason, 2003).

These questions provided the initial framework for the overall analysis which aimed to document the participants' experiences and illuminate the phenomena that may otherwise have gone unnoticed if predetermined strategies for data analysis had been employed. The methodology and the techniques used to analyze and interpret the co-researchers dialogue are discussed below.

Research Methods

For my dissertation I studied the process of how PAR impacts local voice and power relations. In order to do this, I worked with four Early Head Start mothers who wanted to be involved in developing a scale measuring long-term outcomes for Early Head Start families. This is consistent with a PAR approach in which participants actively engage in the research process. PAR depends on a mutual commitment to the investigation of a problem, a collaborative effort on the part of the researcher and the participants in creating strategies to deal with the particular concern, and a desire to take transformative action in addressing the problem (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Fine, 1992; Maguire, 1987; Reinharz, 1992). It also is an emancipatory interest that orients this research toward the release of human potential and the investigation of ideology and power within the organization and society.

This dissertation proposal was contingent upon IRB approval prior to investigation and subject to their conventional standards. As a doctoral student, I attempted to develop a set of strategies for fulfilling the predetermined requirements of a doctoral dissertation, while concurrently recognizing the

importance of a theoretical framework which valued mutuality and joint decision-making between researcher and participant.

Research Methodology for the Process Study

I conducted the methodology for this PAR approach with a philosophy that emphasizes the importance of local community participating actively in making decisions about their desired outcomes for Early Head Start. However, the methodology for studying the process of the PAR project was not fully developed at the onset of the project but rather emerged through iterative cycles of reflection, learning, and redesign. The co-researchers developed specific questions for research, discussed and considered meanings of data and analysis in light of their experience, and then selected next steps for research based on that reflection. The theory evolving out of this process reflects an emergent learning process, utilizing research tools of data gathering, analysis and writing, but grounded in and guided by the dialectic experience (Boser, 2001). Following is a detailed description of the methods used.

Pre-interviews. The study began with individual pre-interviews of co-researchers prior to the initial group session, to gather baseline data regarding their perceptions in several areas focused on voice and power. These interviews lasted for an average of one hour. An interview guide is attached (Appendix A). The individual dialogues were used for three reasons: (1) it gave me the opportunity to see their investment in participating in the project; (2) individual interviews gave me a chance to get to know them better as well as give them a

chance to check me out, and begin the process of being with one another in a PAR process/project; and, (3) starting with individual interviews rather than a group meeting seemed to be less threatening. The structure of these individual dialogues was aimed at getting the Early Head Start mothers to talk about their daily lives and some of the difficulties they were experiencing. This kind of discussion was to initiate the Frierian process of problem-posing.

I recorded my reactions to the interviews immediately upon leaving the interview site. I was able to investigate early on some of the Early Head Start mothers' ideas about how voice and power function within the Early Head Start program. My Administrative Assistant at Community Services of Venango County transcribed all taped interviews as soon as possible following the interview. They were presented to the interviewees for their review prior to any analysis that was conducted.

Participant selection/entry process. The original proposal for this dissertation research called for 10 to 12 co-researchers representing Early Head Start parents, Early Head Start staff, and community members from various sectors. I needed three different groups of people to effectively design this outcomes measurement tool using a PAR approach. First, Early Head Start family members were essential partners in this study because they were the ones who are receiving the services that are going to be studied. By participating in the project, the findings became more meaningful to them and more useful. This process was the best way to ensure that their needs and interests were voiced and not dominated by other interests. Second, Early Head Start staff

were critical partners in helping this project be successful. They had built strong relationships with the families they were working with and would be instrumental in helping to recruit families to the table. They had also invested time in the field project to build a foundation for the outcomes measurement tool and many were interested in continuing their involvement through the PAR project. Third, community partners from the Focus on our Future Collaborative Board would be vital partners to join with us due to their role and involvement with Early Head Start over the past seven years.

Due to the constraints by the IRB regarding participation in the PAR dissertation, previously discussed in Chapter One, Early Head Start staff were excluded from the project. Following is a description of how the actual recruitment took place.

After the final approval from the IRB in August 2004 to begin my dissertation, I went to the Early Head Start Policy Council in September 2004 to give them an update on the status of the IRB's final decision and to get their approval to initiate the project. They gave their approval and created a research committee specifically for this purpose. Four Early Head Start Policy Council members volunteered to be co-researchers at that meeting. The former Policy Council president also expressed an interest in being involved with the project, and the current Policy Council President contacted her and invited her to the orientation. I scheduled an orientation meeting with these initial five potential co-researchers in late September 2004. However, as the new Executive Director of Community Services of Venango County, Inc., I found I could not carry out my

responsibilities of the agency and begin a dissertation at that time of year. I explained this to the group and we targeted mid-to-late January 2005 as a better time to begin.

In January 2005 I returned to Policy Council to again advise them of the status of the project and set a date to meet with the same group from Fall 2004. One mom was experiencing too many difficulties and was unable to participate. One Policy Council member, who was a Head Start representative, also declined due to time constraints. The Policy Council members who were volunteering for the project recruited another Policy Council member to join us at that meeting. The final participants in this PAR project were three Early Head Start mothers currently enrolled in the Early Head Start program, one former Early Head Start parent who had been actively involved in the program, and held the position of Early Head Start policy president for three years, and myself.

I held the orientation meeting with the four Early Head Start mothers and included a discussion on the principles of PAR that would guide this dissertation and these included: participation, critical dialogue, democracy, knowledge generation, reflective practice, human flourishing, empowerment, and social change.

During the orientation, I provided the participants with an explanation of the purpose and procedure of the study. I also explained that the qualitative findings for this study would grow out of the following five kinds of data collection: pre-interviews with co-researchers; participant observations; group meetings; interactive group interviews; written documents; and, post interviews with co-

researchers. During this time they also reviewed consent forms and agreed to all that was involved in this PAR project (Appendix B).

PAR depends on careful initial building of relationships and negotiation of roles. It was of utmost importance to gain confidence of parents in subsequent encounters. This required a considerable amount of time and effort to establish rapport among participants. I needed to build credibility with the Early Head Start mothers in order to gather authentic data. Trustworthiness of the data depended on effectively negotiating entry and building rapport with participants. Thus, having their involvement from the beginning was important for building trust and developing a sense of engagement and ownership among all partners; it provided a good foundation for a respectful partnership to guide the study.

The final team committed to collaborating as co-researchers in this project and we negotiated how we proceeded from that point forward.

Further recruitment efforts. The co-researchers continued the recruiting process by sending out a letter they wrote to all 85 active Early Head Start families (see Appendix C), inviting them to be part of the PAR project and/or dissertation. Early Head Start can accommodate 116 children; thus there are usually 80-90 families active at any one time. All were given an opportunity to voluntarily participate as co-researchers and in the development of the outcomes tool at various stages.

The co-researchers then came up with a plan for responding to the letters returned by the parents. We scheduled three meetings to meet with the five Early Head Start parents interested as co-researchers and the four who wanted

to come to an orientation meeting. We were excited that we had the possibility of nine more Early Head Start parents joining us. At two of the meetings, no one showed up; at the third meeting, one attended and could not commit the time needed.

For the first scheduled meeting, we made telephone calls to invite those interested. No one attended. Letters were sent to schedule a second meeting, along with a phone call the day before the meeting. No one attended.

Telephone contact was made to re-schedule for a third meeting, a follow-up phone contact was made the morning of the meeting. One attended that meeting. I made phone contact with this group again and discussed other ways they could be involved if being a co-researcher was too much time. Seven said they would rather participate in either an individual interview or focus group.

While there were several others who expressed an interest once they were given a clear, detailed overview of what was involved, they could not commit to being part of the co-research team, but they were willing to be involved in other ways.

The co-researchers then discussed the best way to invite community members to join the group. They prepared a presentation for the Focus On Our Future Collaborative Board as a way of recruiting them to join the project and/or dissertation. This Collaborative Board was representative of the non-profits and school districts in Venango County that have a vested interest in the Early Head Start Program. This group meets monthly and has a membership of over 80 members. A more detailed account of the role of the Focus On Our Future Collaborative Board is described in Chapter Four.

On April 14, 2005, the co-researchers carried out their presentation to 40 members, invited them to join the team and left letters and response sheet for all members present. Additional letters were sent to members that were not present that day. While some were interested in providing information to the PAR project, none of the members opted to be a co-researcher for the dissertation. Further discussion of this key event is discussed in Chapter Five.

The recruiting process now became a concern and caused much frustration for all of us. None of our efforts resulted in new participants as co-researchers. We were no where near the number of predetermined participant expectations that I had documented in my proposal. While I was aware that the process for this research was not fully developed at the onset of the project, but rather emerges through an iterative process, I was anxious over how the IRB would interpret this difference in numbers that were projected in my proposal. I also began to worry if I could keep the four Early Head Start mothers who did want to be involved engaged throughout the project. I found myself more concerned with the doctoral dissertation than I was with the PAR process. This brought me to the reality that completing a PAR dissertation in an institution of higher learning is highly contradictory and inherently problematic. Right from the beginning I experienced the actual messiness, complexity, ethics, and ambiguities of effective PAR processes.

Group sessions. An important aspect of PAR is the attention to the daily lives and subjective realities of the participants. Though our respective realities are only partial representations of the whole, it was essential that these realities

had a place to be defined, examined, and challenged. Therefore, the five of us participated weekly in 22 group sessions lasting approximately two hours each from February 2005 through the end of July 2005.

The goals of the research sessions varied. They were also subjected to change, since one of the facets of PAR is sharing the construction and the creation of knowledge with all participants. I developed a tentative framework from which to begin to investigate the meaning of voice and power, and the relationship between these constructs and the co-researchers lived experiences. The overall framework that guided the sessions was as follows: (1) engage the participants in dialectical consciousness-raising experiences around the issues of voice and power; (2) name and analyze their realities around these issues while weaving the principles of PAR throughout; (3) provide a opportunity for the participants to locate themselves within the larger social service arena as Early Head Start mothers, thinking critically about their Early Head Start program; and, (4) a commitment to the process of learning that is transformative in nature.

These group discussions provided ways to create voice, discuss problems, and critique them. We organized the group sessions around a theme, a question, a training, an experience the mothers had during an in home interview or focus group (field sites), a problem posed by the researcher or the participants, or an idea that emerged from the project itself. The nature of PAR is one of surprise and “Aha” experiences that often times re-direct a researcher’s predetermined agenda. These discussions were audio-taped and transcribed. Like the pre-interviews, these transcriptions were presented to the co-

researchers for their feedback and critique prior to- and- during the formal analysis

I was a participant, an observer, a facilitator, and a researcher in these sessions, cognizant of the fact that the need to discuss the lived experiences of the co-researchers is central tenet of PAR. They were integral in the direction of the dialogue and were instrumental in creating the data. The data were created through a dialectical process of demystifying the expert, while simultaneously, living a participatory process. When the expert is seen as the vehicle for imparting knowledge to the inexperienced, the spirit of participatory research is lost and the participants are no longer the emancipators of their own transformation. The co-researchers in this study would not grow and become self-reflective through being told about the power of voice. They did, however, engage in a consciousness-raising experience through being creators of their own research story, a story that evolved as a result of using the multiple resources brought to the experience.

The specific resources I brought to this project emerged out of my continued engagement with the various aspects of PAR. They were jumping off points for participants who were just beginning to feel their own voice (Greene, 1992). They ranged from structuring group discussions about the co-researchers lived experiences, and their daily encounters with voice, to discussing the challenges that occurred in the field. The co-researchers also had the opportunities to individually and collectively discuss their interviews, share their own interpretations of that experience, and make meaning of what emerged from

their personal and group voices. These resources were strategies for initiating critical consciousness-raising discussions during the research experience. They were subject to change and modification. Their reason for being was intimately tied to a PAR methodology that makes personal and collective transformation core components of the research process.

Interactive group interview. I proposed to hold two interactive group interviews with the co-researchers in order for them to present their perspectives and have the opportunity to question each other; one was held. Such interactive designs permit participants to negotiate meaning and offer challenges or verification to validity (Boser, 2001). I structured the conversation in the beginning, with a topic and a general interview guide to elicit perceptions and supporting evidence about the issues that were emerging from the study (see Appendix D). The first interactive group interview was held July, 2005. Due to constraints levied by the IRB on August 1, 2005, the second interactive group was not held, nor were post-interviews with the co-researchers; in fact all research came to a halt at that point and did not continue. A more detailed discussion of this key event can be found in Chapter Five.

Participant observation. As a participant observer, I employed multiple and overlapping data collection strategies. I was fully engaged in experiencing the setting while at the same time observing and talking with the co-researchers about whatever was happening. Full participant observation constitutes an omnibus strategy in that it “simultaneously combines document analysis,

interviewing of respondents and informants, direct participation and observation, and introspection” (Denzin, 1978b, p. 183).

I developed close relationships with the co-researchers as the weeks progressed, sharing many meals and personal conversations with them. Many of these informal conversations occurred as we traveled to and from various workshops and seminars. I always waited until later to record my notes where I wrote about what I observed while participating in their lives. This immersion involved not only being with the co-researchers to see how they responded to events as they happened but also experiencing these events for myself and the circumstances in which they occurred.

Fieldnotes. I kept detailed fieldnotes to record my observations of the group sessions and other events that occurred throughout the study along with my personal reactions to the resulting dialogue. These documents also helped me to reflect upon my own consciousness-raising experiences that occurred during the project. The fieldnotes guided me in the process of remembering events and experiences, describing and interpreting situations, developing (and re-developing) ideas, questions, and goals, and reminding me that my own subjectivity and positions within this research were important factors in the research/process/product.

I also recorded and tracked analytical thoughts in my fieldnotes that occurred during data collection. This provided me with an opportunity to deepen data collection that would test the authenticity of those insights while still in the

field. Patton (2002) states that this overlapping of data collection and analysis improves both the quality of data collected and the quality of the analysis.

In the next section, I describe a method of analysis that captured the interpretive nature of how the co-researchers perceived their voice made a contribution during this project, guided by the principles of PAR.

Analysis

My analysis began through the initial interactions with the co-researchers, and continued throughout the study. The earlier stages tended to be generative and emergent, following wherever the data led. During the study, I worked to progressively narrow, and focus on, the key aspects of their data. This involved many steps and iterations: gathering data; examining data; comparing prior data to newer data; and, developing new data that emerged during the process.

I used both an inductive and deductive approach to analysis. I used an inductive approach early on when I analyzed the contents of the data, searching for patterns, themes, and categories. Once these were established, I moved to a deductive analysis to determine the connections between the inductive content analysis and their link to the principles of PAR, as one of my primary questions was to determine the impact of the principles of PAR to this study. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998):

At the heart of theorizing lies the interplay of making inductions (deriving concepts, their properties, and dimensions from data) and deductions (hypothesizing about the relationships between concepts. (p. 22)

Prior to beginning my analysis, it was important for me to identify the sensitizing concepts I brought to the data that provided me with a “general sense of reference . . . and direction along which to look” (Blumer, 1969, p. 148). I carried out this analysis by bringing a critical perspective on social justice. The heart of social justice issues regarding power and voice gave meaning to this PAR project. A social justice focus sensitized me to look at the individual experiences and the larger social structures in new ways. By focusing the data gathering, I sought new information to examine these concepts such as equality, fairness, hierarchies, policies, practices, and legitimacy. Charmaz (2005) states: “this approach broadens and sharpens the scope of inquiry by locating subjective and collective experience in larger structures and increases understandings of how these structures work” (p. 508).

I began the inductive analysis of data gathered through participant observations and group sessions that focused on the interactions of the co-researchers. This allowed the meanings to be organized from their perspectives and in their words. Through the initial analysis of my fieldnotes, audiotapes, and transcripts I identified themes to be explored further and began to develop an initial category system (Patton, 1997). Throughout the research project, I listened, and re-listened, to the session tapes, identifying the codes and concepts that I heard each week, keeping in mind that concepts are never a substitute for direct experience with the descriptive data (Patton, 2002). I then offered these as reflections to the co-researchers during our weekly meetings. They became

the basis of helping us to think through the process of making meaning of voice and power.

My primary data analysis methods were code development and thematic analysis. Coding procedures helped provide some standardization and rigor to the analytical process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In order to begin to make sense of the data, I coded the data at three different levels. At the first level the data was sorted into concepts. These concepts were further placed in categories and finally categories formed the themes at the final level of coding (Maxwell, 1996; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I used this general framework to guide the analysis; that is the data were broken down, conceptualized, and put back together in new ways as my central process for discovering themes.

I then moved to selective coding around categories that had some connection to this story as an approach to refine and integrate them throughout the process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Charmaz (1995) and Glaser (1978) describe selective coding as more directed and conceptual than open coding. These categories were used to shape the discussions and direction of future group sessions with the co-researchers. I then categorized the information by grouping the concepts at a higher, more abstract level. The interrelatedness of this process necessitated that I move freely between methods, usually not sequentially, but always connecting to the previous level.

Following the completed transcriptions, I read and re-read the texts multiple times. During these initial readings, I described concepts found in the

co-researchers' dialogue in the margins of the transcripts. Some of the concepts were descriptive (I would write anger if a co-researcher said: "I'm angry"); others were less defined by their exact words (I used term powerless to conceptualize how the co-researchers spoke about being unable to do anything about having their voice heard). After reading the texts multiple times, I began to link the various concepts and codes that developed across the session texts. Out of that process, I found patterns, labeled themes, and developed category systems that materialized from the interviews and participant observations generated by this analysis. Later stages brought closure by deepening insights into patterns that emerged (Patton, 2002).

Through this analysis, it also became apparent that the narrative itself included significant data to be analyzed. By studying the narrative, 11 key events materialized that were organized to further analyze the data. These were:

- Initial Connections with Early Head Start;
- Critical Event with the Institutional Review Board;
- Beginning of Participatory Action Research Project;
- Opportunity to Build Community Partnerships;
- Engaging in Learning Communities;
- Interviews with Early Head Start Staff;
- Focus Groups with Early Head Start Home visitors;
- Tensions within the Agency;
- Increased Scrutiny from the Institutional Review Board;
- Direction of Dissertation ; and,

- Dilemma with Co-researchers.

In Chapter Five, I describe each of these key events in detail (Appendix E, summary of events), and in Chapter Six I present the analysis of these findings. Having presented the methods I used to do data analysis, I will now discuss the quality of the data gathered.

Data Quality

The rigors of conventional research, guided by the positivist research paradigm, is judged according to four criteria: internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Because of the stress on objectivity and generalizations of finding, these criteria do not work with qualitative research. Guba and Lincoln (1989) propose alternative criteria for trustworthiness and authenticity to support the strength of the interpretations and conclusions. According to Lincoln and Guba, a study's trustworthiness involves the demonstration that the researcher's interpretation of the data are credible to those who provided the data. Credibility is seen as "the match between the constructed realities of respondents (or stakeholders) and those realities as represented by the evaluator and attributed to various stakeholders" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 237).

Herr and Anderson (2005) stated that while the standards for qualitative inquiry are different from those used by quantitative researchers, they still may not be appropriate for PAR researchers. They have begun to define indicators of quality for PAR, and I have chosen to use their criteria to assess the quality for

this PAR dissertation. They have linked five validity criteria (outcome, process, democratic, catalytic, and dialogic) to the goals of action PAR.

Most traditions of PAR agree on the following goals: (a) the generation of new knowledge; (b) the achievement of action-oriented outcomes; (c) the education of both researcher and participants; (d) results that are relevant to the local setting; and, (e) a sound and appropriate research methodology. Based on these goals, I will discuss how these identified indicators of quality are linked to my PAR study.

Dialogic validity. Dialogic validity is connected to the generation of new knowledge. In order to promote dialogic validity, I participated in critical and reflective dialogue with the other co-researchers. Working in this manner helped us think through and clarify the conditions under which interpretation and understanding took place. The give and take of this process provided us with a way to review existing concepts in light of new understandings. This approach, with co-researchers participating in the analysis and negotiation of meaning is in itself an assurance of quality and “the single most important technique in establishing credibility” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 239).

Also important for dialogic validity is to work with a critical friend who is familiar with the setting and can serve as a devil’s advocate for alternative explanations of research data. Although PAR was new to my doctoral program, I was fortunate in that my dissertation chair is an action researcher and completed an action research dissertation in 2001. She willingly shared her experiences with the dissertation process, validated the challenges I experienced

along the way, pushed me to think more deeply, and instilled the hope I needed to be able to carry out a PAR dissertation.

Outcome validity. Outcome validity is associated with the achievement of action-oriented outcomes. PAR researchers must be good at both research procedures and moving participants toward successful action outcomes. Jacobson (1998) states that integrity must rest on “the quality of action which emerges from it, and the quality of data on which the action is based” (p. 130). Outcome validity compelled us to frame problems in more complex ways, often leading to an alternative course of action. This ongoing reframing of problems led us to the spiral dynamic that characterizes the process of most action research over a sustained period of time. For instance, as a result of pursuing collaborative board members, changes were made to this board’s agenda, as well as re-convening a smaller committee to review the results of the project. Chapter Five provides specific details of these and other changes, attesting to the validity of the work.

Catalytic validity. Catalytic validity is related to the education of both researcher and participants. Research that possesses catalytic validity will not only display the reality-altering impact of the inquiry process; it will also direct this impact so that those under study will gain self-understanding and self-direction (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). In Chapter Six, I provide evidence of how my thinking and the thinking of the co-researchers changed over time, attesting to the catalytic validity of this work.

Democratic validity. Democratic validity brings together results that are relevant to the local setting. All persons should have the right and opportunity to participate in the deliberation and decision-making of the institutions to which their actions contribute or which directly affect their actions. These participatory processes are the best way for people to ensure their own needs and interests will be voiced and will not be dominated by other interests (Young, 1990).

Extensive efforts were made to do this research in collaboration with all parties who had a stake in the problem under investigation. Democratic validity views the inclusion of multiple voices as an ethical and social justice issue. We made it a priority to honor and understand the perspectives of all parties that we were able to engage and searched for solutions that could benefit multiple stakeholders.

Process validity. Process validity focuses on sound and appropriate research methodology. It asks to what extent problems are framed and solved in a manner that permits ongoing learning of the individual or system. The findings are a result of a series of reflective cycles that include looping back to reexamine underlying assumptions behind problem definitions (Argyris, et al., 1985). The co-researchers provided data and participated in the beginning analysis of the project leading to the negotiation of meaning. The notion of triangulation fits here, and we strengthened our study by including multiple voices whenever possible, and multiple methods to support the depth of our interpretations and conclusions (Patton, 2002).

Prolonged engagement of PAR. Finally, a significant factor related to validity is that authentic relationships must be maintained between the researcher and participants. I accomplished this through the prolonged engagement I had not only with the Early Head Start mothers but with the Early Head Start program as well. Besides the eight months that I carried out this study, I was engaged in Early Head Start for over four years prior to this dissertation, and was involved with the idea for this project since its conception in 2002. It contributed immensely to building trust and rapport among the co-researchers and key community partners as well as providing rich information about the context.

Summary

Qualitative inquiry using ethnography was the best fit for data analysis of the study. Ethnography provided an approach that enhanced the discovery of thick, rich descriptions of the co-researchers experiences. This was not a clear-cut undertaking by any means, but a rather messy process until I discovered the best fit for the analysis. The credibility of the study was further improved by using more than one method of analysis.

Finally, I need to point out certain limitations of the study. The purpose of the study was not for generalization to other situations but was focused on a particular setting. Therefore, the study is limited to the setting in which it took place. While I attempted to acknowledge my biases and keep them out of the research, others may point to my familiarity with the co-researchers and my intimate knowledge of the local setting as potentially prejudicial to the study.

Having fully developed the PAR framework for this undertaking both in terms of theoretic relevance and methodological approach, I will proceed with a more detailed description of the specific context of this work.

CHAPTER FOUR

PAR PROJECT AS CONTEXT FOR POWER AND VOICE

Introduction

In this study, the co-researchers were involved in a collaborative approach that assumes they are experts on the context of the research and are able to contribute valuable information for the project. In the following section, I describe in some detail the substantive problem this effort sought to address. Following that, I provide a description of the research setting that includes a historical background of the national Early Head Start program and the specific context for this effort that was crucial to facilitate this PAR dissertation.

The Substantive Context: Human Service Systems, Accountability, and Alternative Program Evaluations

Human service organizations are under tremendous pressure to show measurable results. The question of how to measure agency and program performance effectively in ways that help improve performance has taken hold in government over the past several years, and over the past few years in the nonprofit sector as well (Poister, 2003). This movement in human services toward accountability was brought about by at least four major changes in the political and organizational landscape of the social service delivery system in the United States:

- (1) increased interest in accountability and performance measurement in all levels of government and in the nonprofit sector, (2) the delegation of

social services from the federal level to states, (3) the increased reliance on nonprofit organizations for service delivery and, (4) the proliferation of complex social service provider networks made up of multiple sponsors and stakeholders. (Fredricks, Carman, & Birkland, 2002)

Public policy and managed care initiatives have mandated measures of accountability as an integral part of service delivery in social work and other human service disciplines. The demand for accountability and the need to demonstrate effectiveness unfolded during the 1990s, and funding agencies at all levels began to require that service providers develop mechanisms to respond to these issues. The federal government, through the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (P.L. No. 103-62) requires government at all levels to establish performance measures for all federally funded programs under Performance Partnership Grants (PPG). The performance measurement movement is proposed as a management tool to be used, not primarily to determine cutbacks and contain costs, “but to clarify what we want to achieve, document the contribution we can make to achieve our goals, and document what we are getting for our investment” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1995, p. 19).

As an outcome of this movement, there are growing demands on managers and agencies to focus on results and to work deliberately to strengthen performance (Poister, 2003). Performance measurement can be used to strengthen management and informed decision making, achieve results and improve overall performance, and increase accountability. Osborne and

Gaebler (1992) point out in the book, *Reinventing Government*, “What gets measured gets done” (p. 146), “if you don’t measure results, you can’t tell success from failure” (p. 147), and “if you can’t recognize failure, you can’t reward it” (p. 152). Thus, performance measures have become essential for letting managers know how things stand along the way so that they can act accordingly to maintain or improve performance (Poister, 2003).

Historical Development of Performance Measurement

Performance measurement is not a new idea. Rather, it is an established concept that has taken on greatly new importance in the current context of public and nonprofit management. Measuring workload and worker efficiency was clearly part of the scientific management approach that influenced government reformers in the early 20th century, and the International City Management Association produced a publication on measuring municipal activities as early as 1943 (Ridley & Simons, 1943). In the federal government, interest in performance measures ignited when systems analysis processes were brought into the Department of Defense during the Kennedy administration, and it spread to other agencies when the Johnson administration implemented a planning-programming-budgeting system (DEWoolfson, 1975; Lyden & Miller, 1978).

Over time, various state, county, and municipal governments began to experiment with performance measurement in conjunction with efforts to strengthen their management and budgeting systems (Poister, 2003). In addition, interest in program evaluation became widespread in the 1970s as governmental agencies at all levels recognized the need to assess the

effectiveness of newer social programs (Rossi, Freeman, & Wright, 1979; Rossi & Williams, 1972; Suchman, 1967; Weiss, 1972). This movement encouraged agencies to track measures at regular intervals and monitor program performance over time.

Harry Hatry and colleagues at the Urban Institute began publishing materials that promoted the use of performance measures and provided instruction on how to develop and use them (Hatry & Fisk, 1971). Others applied this kind of work in greater depth in particular program areas (Poister, 1983). However, despite these activities and enthusiasm, there was a sense that the promise and potential of performance measurement greatly exceeded its actual usefulness in practice. According to Poister (2003), this was in part a matter of methodological sophistication, or the lack of it, as measuring the outcomes produced by many public programs was found to be a very difficult undertaking. One of the underlying premises of the book on *The Search for Government Efficiency* (Downs & Larkey, 1986) was that for a variety of reasons most governmental jurisdictions were incapable of measuring the performance of their programs. Therefore, interest in performance measurement appeared to wane in the mid-1980s because measures were increasingly perceived as not making meaningful contributions to decision making.

However, a number of forces in the field of public administration reinvigorated interest in performance measurement in the 1990s. Taxpayer revolts, pressure for privatization of public services, legislative initiatives aimed at controlling “runaway” spending, and the devolution of many responsibilities to

lower levels of government generated increased demands to hold governmental agencies accountable to legislatures and the public in terms of what they spend and the results they produce (Poister, 2003).

Performance measurement also became increasingly important for managers of nonprofit organizations as well (Berman & West, 1998; Schuster, 1997). By the early 1990s nonprofit health and human service agencies were tracking measures regarding financial accountability, program outputs, quality standards in service delivery, demographics, efficiency, and client satisfaction.

Over the past decade the emphasis has shifted to developing measures of outcomes (United Way of America, 1998). Similar to the convergence of forces that has brought about a heightened commitment to performance measurement in government, this has come about in the nonprofit sector because funding sources, accrediting bodies, managed-care entities, the general public, and nonprofit leaders all share a concern for producing results (Hendricks, 2002).

In every arena of action--health, education, criminal justice, employment, international development--emphasis has shifted from providing services to attaining priority outcomes (Patton, 2002). Under the umbrella of the United Way of America, many national nonprofit organizations in the field of health and human services have become heavily involved in outcome measurement. They have promoted the use of performance measures by conducting research in this area, designing processes for the development and utilization of measurement systems, and providing resources and assistance to help other nonprofits measure their own performance (Plantz, Greenway, & Hendricks, 1997).

According to the United Way (1996) manual *Measuring Program*

Outcomes:

In growing numbers, service providers, governments, other funders, and the public are calling for clearer evidence that the resources they expanded actually produce benefits for people. Consumers of services and volunteers who provide services want to know that programs to which they devote their time really make a difference. That is, they want better accountability for the use of resources. One clear and compelling answer to the question of “Why measure outcomes?” is: To see if programs really make a difference in the lives of people. (p. 4)

Thus, in both the public and nonprofit sectors, this stepped-up commitment to performance measurement is supporting efforts to providing a clearer focus on mission and strategy, improve management and decision making, improve performance itself, and increase accountability to governing bodies and external stakeholders, including agencies and the public (Poister, 1997).

Challenges for Human Service Agencies

Human service workers are increasingly being held accountable for solutions to problems that have their roots in the deeply complex interactions between the experiences of individual and the realities of their social lives (Stringer, 1999). One of the issues here is how can building an evaluation system that measures program outcomes be mainstreamed into nonprofits in a way that is not only efficient but effective and meaningful for all stakeholders

involved. Human service agencies are faced with the challenge of developing appropriate systems and processes if they want to remain viable in the coming decades (Kettner, Moroney, & Martin, 1999). The results of these trends are that human service providers are confronted with the challenge of greater demands for quality programs. As they search for more effective ways of making progress toward their missions, the challenges of building organizational capacity and effective program evaluations become paramount. These concerns are addressed as follows.

Capacity Building

Although the roots of capacity building grew from the community empowerment movement of the 1970s (Crisp, Sweissen, & Duckett, 2000), recent motivations for capacity building in nonprofits come from the expectation that organizations with the requisite management and service delivery strengths will sustain (Backer, 2001). The need to build capacity in nonprofits has become self-evident among foundations (Backer, 2001) and the message that this is an expectation of the funding source is unmistakably clear. Growing numbers of grantmakers believe that investing in organizational capacity helps leverage their philanthropic resources (Porter & Kramer, 1999). Nonprofits have an obligation to seek new and more effective ways of making progress toward their missions, and this requires building organizational capacity. It has become increasingly important to know how to develop sustainable sources to support in order to continue their work. Building the capacity of nonprofits requires assessing community information capacity, strengthening social and technological

communication in the community, using information for community change, and providing technical assistance to support community information use.

Capacity building has been defined as “the intentional work to continually create and sustain overall organizational processes that make quality evaluation and its uses routine” (Stockdill, Baizerman, & Compton, 2002, p. 14). These authors emphasized that the process of evaluation capacity building is dependent on the context of the organization, that it happens through intentional and sustained effort, that it requires guidance, and that as a result evaluation becomes ordinary practice within the organization. They also discussed several factors that must be considered to understand the process of evaluation building efforts. These include the role of the stakeholders, the source of the demand for evaluation, the multilayered and nuanced levels of an organization, the types of methods and training needed, and the resources and flexibility required for successful capacity building efforts (Arnold, 2006).

Contextual understanding of the organization is becoming increasingly important in developing methods to build evaluation capacity. As Torres and Preskill (2001) pointed out, there has been a recent shift from large-scale external evaluations, from which the results were rarely used within the organization, to more flexible, internal evaluations that use results to learn about, understand, and improve local practice. This change requires that organizations develop a culture that understands and appreciates the value of evaluation in order to ensure evaluation success (Arnold, 2006).

Torres and Preskill (2001) explored the development and evaluation culture within organizations, particularly focusing on the role of evaluation capacity in public agencies. The authors emphasized that the skills, knowledge, and attitudes of individuals within the organization are important factors in determining evaluation competence. An organization's capacity is its potential to perform; its ability to successfully apply its skills and resources toward the accomplishment of its goals and the satisfaction of its stakeholders' expectations. The heart of nonprofit capacity building involves critical thinking about how the organization can best address the needs of its community.

However, according to the McKinsey and Company Report (2001):

While the benefits of capacity building may be compelling, the actual effort of building capacity can seem daunting. It can be hard for the nonprofit manager to fund, hard to launch, and hard to implement. It takes a long time and the need is not always apparent to staff, volunteers, board members, or donors. (p. 16)

There is a growing need to help nonprofits become stronger, more sustainable, and better able to serve their communities. Evaluation was once the sole province of experts whose job it was to determine the value of government programs. There was an expectation that trained professionals, applying the scientifically driven performance based approach will provide answers to the multitude of growing social problems. The human services field used experts to dominate policy formation, decision making about research, and program development while excluding meaningful participation and democratic dialogue

from those who use their services. However, evidence continues to mount showing that these responses have limited success in diminishing the multitude of growing social problems. According to Stringer (1999) the billions of dollars invested in social programs have failed to stem the tide of alienation and disaffection that characterizes social life in modern industrial nations.

Evaluation capacity building is a relatively new conceptual development in evaluation, and there is little research that documents which techniques work for what types of organizations or activities and under what circumstances (Boris, 2001). Without a well-articulated and established body of knowledge from which to draw lessons, nonprofits are often forced into a haphazard approach to capacity building. Greenwood and Levin (2000) argue that academic science in the 20th century has been unable to accomplish these goals to help human services due to the inability of positivistic, value-free social science to produce useful social science research. Greenwood (2002) believes that academically-based social sciences, both pure and applied, have lost their relevance to practical human affairs. In response to these failed attempts, human services are searching for alternative methods to meet their needs. How one defines and measures intended outcomes then becomes a central question. We often ended with celebrating that we delivered the program. The outcomes question now asks, “what are we actually achieving in the lives of those we serve?” (Patton, 2005).

Alternative Program Evaluations

Nonprofits have discovered that performance measurement is not a panacea for all the problems and challenges that confront their agencies. Many of the problems that human service organizations seek to address have no easy solutions in sight, and the available resources are often inadequate to address them effectively. While the results of performance measurements are important to provide concrete evidence of overall patterns of effectiveness; it is also important to show the human faces behind the numbers. It is important to provide critical context when interpreting statistical outcomes as well as to make sure that the numbers can be understood as representing meaningful changes in the lives of real people and illuminate dimensions of desired outcomes that are difficult to quantify (Patton, 2002).

Another danger of outcome measurement is that it can miss the complexity of local implementations and results--the unique, untidy results related to group and community dynamics and charismatic leadership--that may lie at the core of what constitutes successful program operations (Greene, 1999). While the accountability movement is part of the current political reality, it is important to insist that definitions and measures of program quality honor the inherent complexity, plurality, and dynamic intersubjectivity of human experience" (Green, 1999, p.171).

A review of evaluation literature provides strong evidence of a paradigm shift occurring in human services. Robert Stake (1973) offered a new vision and rationale for educational and social evaluation by reframing evaluation from the

application of sophisticated analytic techniques that address distant policymakers questions of program benefits and effectiveness “on the average,” to an engagement with on-site practitioners about the quality and meaning of their practice. These ideas helped accelerate a transformation of the evaluation enterprise into its current pluralistic character (Greene & Abma, 2001).

Over time, several theories of evaluation have emerged such as participatory, collaborative, inclusive, democratic, feminist, empowerment, and emancipatory evaluation, among others. While each perspective is unique, their underlying themes include who carries out the program, who are participating in it, and do they have more knowledge than the evaluator who still has to discover what is going on. These types of evaluation focus on stakeholder issues, such as power imbalances, and engage stakeholders in dialogues about the quality of their practice. The aim is to heighten the personal and mutual understanding of stakeholders as a vehicle for practice improvement (Abma, 2006). This reframing of evaluation is one response to the challenges that nonprofits have faced in finding an alternative to performance measurement.

Several definitions of evaluation have also emerged. Patton (1997) defines program evaluation as the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming. Preskill and Torres (1999) define evaluative inquiry as an ongoing process for investigating and understanding critical organization issues. It is an approach to learning that is fully integrated with an organization’s work

practice. Fetterman's (1994) definition included "the use of evaluation concepts, techniques, and findings to foster improvement and self determination" (p. 1). He later refined this definition in collaboration with Wandersman (2005) as:

An approach that aims to increase the probability of achieving program success by (1) providing program stakeholders with tools for assessing the planning, implementation, and self-evaluation of their program, and (2) mainstreaming evaluation as part of the planning and management of the program/organization. (p. 28)

Through alternative methods of program evaluation there is the possibility that sustainable capacity can be built; that those involved feel a real sense of ownership of the process that makes a difference in how they participate, think, and behave. Participants can develop skills at using evidence and these skills become generalized and carried forward in practice, and communities can point to the knowledge they have gained and how they have used that knowledge (Patton, 2005).

Slowly, human service organizations are beginning to pay increased attention to stakeholders involvement in research, outcome measurement, and evaluation activities. Changes in philosophy and service delivery systems have resulted in families being recognized as a source of valuable information. In this shift, the individual and or family member's points of view are valued and serve as the basis for service delivery. If we are serious about helping people, we must try to understand their social worlds; the contexts within which they interact on a daily basis.

These elements all involve empowering citizens by changing the relation between professionals and people who use their services. The shift which encourages participation with families and communities, involves some fundamental changes in the way human services are typically delivered (Adams & Nelson, 1995). Key elements of success include trust and building partnerships based on shared power. This change recognizes that each partner brings important information and abilities to the table. Families are empowering themselves when they establish partnerships with providers in shaping policy and providing direction to program and staff development. For this type of partnership to develop, it is necessary to accept families as partners, work with them to develop a common language, and provide training and support. As stated by Pyke and Apa (1994) “active involvement of users in the shaping and evaluation of services is critical to service relevance. Service providers and researchers need to recognize and tap into that expertise in a way that is validating” (p. 26).

Thus, while alternative approaches hold promise for more effective ways to provide program evaluations within human service arenas, more research is needed in a variety of settings for progress to be made. The Early Head Start PAR project is one specific setting that sought to address these concerns.

Overview of National Early Head Start Program

The Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF) initiated the Early Head Start program in response to the 1994 Head Start reauthorization, which established a special initiative for services to families with infants and toddlers. This comprehensive, two-generation program includes intensive

services that begin before the child is born and concentrate on enhancing the child's development and supporting the family during the critical first three years of the child's life.

Nationally, Early Head Start began with 68 programs in 1995 and has grown to a nationwide effort of over 700 community based programs serving over 70,000 children. With an increasing share of the federal budget, Early Head Start is an ambitious effort in which the ACYF is responding to the “quiet crisis” facing infants and toddlers in this country, as identified by the Carnegie corporation of New York in its 1994 *Starting Points* (Raikes & Love, 2002).

Early Head Start programs were established to expand the benefits of early childhood development to low income families with children under three and to pregnant women. The purpose of this program is to enhance children's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development; enable parents to be better caregivers of and teachers to their children; and help parents meet their own goals, including that of economic independence.

The services provided by Early Head Start programs are designed to reinforce and respond to the unique strengths and needs of each child and family. Services include quality early education in and out of the home; home visits; parent education, including parent-child activities; comprehensive health services, including services to women before, during and after pregnancy; nutrition; and, case management and peer support groups for parents.

Early Head Start focuses on four cornerstones essential to quality programs: child development, family development, community-building, and staff

development. Research projects must coordinate with local Early Head Start programs to ensure continuity of services for children and families.

The past three decades of developmental research promoted the vision that intervention with economically disadvantaged young children and their families is essential for providing a healthy foundation for future child development (Carnegie Corporation, 1994). In this overview, I will present some of the key features of Early Head Start, such as the policy context, program approaches, and Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project. Finally I will discuss the promises of Early Head Start.

Early Head Start: The Policy Context

In response to the 1994 reauthorizing legislation, the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) appointed the Advisory Committee on Services for Families with Infants and Toddlers to design this new program. The 1994 Head Start authorization established a special initiative setting aside 3% of 1995 Head Start funding, 4% of 1996 and 1997 funding, and 5% of 1998 funding for services to families with infants and toddlers. The 1998 Coats Human Services Reauthorization Act increased EHS funding to 7.5% for fiscal year 1999, 8% for fiscal year 2000, 9% for 2001, and 10% for 2002 and 2003 (Raikes & Love, 2002). However, these were the last year for increases. In its fiscal year 2007 budget proposal, the Bush administration proposed a zero increase in federal funding for the second straight year for Early Head Start programs. The National Head Start Association estimates this would result in the equivalent of closing enrollment to at least 19,000 children in fiscal year 2007.

Combined with these cuts, Early Head Start programs have experienced a 11% real cut in federal funding since 2003. Consequently many programs must reduce the number of children served in order that the remaining children receive a high quality early childhood education (National Head Start Association, 2006).

During the initial period of Early Head Start's implementation, significant changes at the national, state, and local levels were occurring, potentially affecting the approaches taken by Early Head Start programs, the way families responded, and how programs and communities interacted. For example, the increasing focus on the importance of early development (including brain development) attracted attention and support of policymakers, program sponsors, and community members for Early Head Start services and caused some Early Head Start programs to increase their emphasis on child development (Raikes & Love, 2002).

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) was enacted just as Early Head Start began serving families, causing some services to adjust their service delivery plans to meet changing family needs. Some states did not exempt mothers of infants from the new work requirements, so with welfare reform, some parents became more receptive to employment related services and less available to participate in program activities.

In some states, changes associated with PRWORA have made it easier for families to obtain child-care subsidies and have spurred states to improve child-care quality and expand its supply. Several states in which Early Head

Start research programs are located have increased funding for child care, aided centers seeking accreditation, or facilitated quality improvements for infant-toddler care. The federal Fatherhood Initiative has heightened attention to the role of fathers in a wide range of federal programs and has increased Early Head Start program's efforts to draw men into their program activities and their children's lives.

The Advisory Committee also stressed continuous program improvement and recommended that both national and local research be conducted to inform the development of the new Early Head Start program and recommended that program standards specify self-assessment, data collection, and annual feedback on program goals and objectives. Both the 1994 and 1998 reauthorizing legislation specified that an evaluation begin early to focus on learning about the effects the services being delivered to families with infants and toddlers (Raikes & Love, 2002).

Early Head Start Program Approaches

Early Head Start programs carry out the mandate to provide services to pregnant women and families with infants and toddlers in a variety of ways, following the Head Start program Performance Standards (U.S. DHHS, 1996) and guidance from the Advisory Committee on Services for families with infants and toddlers. The Advisory Committee consolidated knowledge from research literature and from practice into nine principles to guide Early Head Start programs. These principles required attention to: (a) high quality; (b) prevention and promotion; (c) positive relationships and continuity, (d) parent involvement;

(e) inclusion; (f) culture; (g) comprehensiveness, flexibility, responsiveness, and intensity; (h) transition; and, (i) collaboration (Raikes & Love, 2002). These principles and the revised Head Start program Performance Standards set the stage for quality through specific practices.

The community and family assessments undertaken by Early Head Start programs help them to determine which program option(s) best meet the needs of families in their local community. Often one program option does not meet the developmental needs of a child over a three year period, or support the family's changing needs and circumstances. As a result, Early Head Start programs often offer more than one program option so that children can receive the services they need as their family needs change.

Children and families enrolled in center-based programs receive comprehensive child development services in a center-based setting, supplemented with home visits by the child's teacher and other Early Head Start staff. In home-based settings children and their families are supported through weekly home visits and bi-monthly group socialization experiences. Early Head Start also serves children through locally designed family child care options, in which certified child care providers care for children in their homes

The Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project

The Head Start community has historically embraced research as an important pathway to knowledge. Research on Head Start participants has added substantially to our understanding of the development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their families. Additionally, evaluations of Head

Start and similar comprehensive preschool programs have resulted in a wealth of data pointing to the benefits of these programs for disadvantaged young children (Garces, Currie, & Thomas, 2000; Oden, Schweinhart, & Weikart, 2000; Schaefer & Cohen 2000).

Despite the availability of these many strands of evidence, scholars and policy makers have issued a call for more research on a variety of human service programs to ensure that public dollars are being spent in the most beneficial manner. This call for increased program accountability and evidence-based practice has not gone unheeded by Head Start professionals. In the last decade, a variety of initiatives have been mounted to enhance the research capacity of Head Start and to maximize the policy-relevant evidence emanating from programs.

Scholars across a broad range of specialty areas have argued for the use of research to inform policy and practice (Denner, Cooper, Lopez, & Dunbar, 1999; Melton, 1995). Policies regarding young children and their families have benefited immensely from developmental and evaluation research (Woodhead, 1988; Zigler & Styfco, 1998). For example, evidence derived from research on Head Start suggests that for programs to be effective, they should be long-term and of high quality (Zigler & Styfco, 1993).

Head Start advisory committees began calling for research that examines the conditions under which programs are successful and for whom programs can be most effective. The reauthorizations of 1994 and 1998 specified that new Head Start programs for infants and toddlers be evaluated early and that the

performance standards be required to have an evaluative process that promotes continuous program improvement. Thus, the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation project was designed to be not only an evaluation of the initial stages of Early Head Start, but also to be an important step in expanding the Early Head Start knowledge base in very systematic ways. In the words of the Committee:

Evaluation of Early Head Start is essential for determining the effectiveness of the initiative and for advancing our understanding about which services work best for different types of families under different circumstances The Advisory Committee believes that the Secretary must approach evaluation not just as a mechanism for producing summary statistics and reports about the changes in child and family development as a result of these new efforts, but as a tool for individual programs so that they can continuously refine their practices based on feedback from their own program evaluation In keeping with the Head Start national laboratory role, we encourage research that examines variations in Early Head Start experiences on child development to learn more about the effectiveness of different interventions for very young children and their families. (p. 7)

A rigorous evaluation of Early Head Start in 17 programs selected from the first program cohorts shows that the program had significant and positive impacts on a wide range of parent and child dimensions, some with implications for children's later school success. Findings from the study (*Making a Difference in the Lives of Infants and Toddlers and Their Families: The Impacts of Early*

Head Start), using data gathered when children were age three and had completed the program, show that the program sustained and broadened the pattern of impacts reported when children were two years-old (*Building Their Futures: How Early Head Start Programs are Enhancing the Lives of Infants and Toddlers in Low-Income Families*).

The national evaluation conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., and Columbia University's Center for Children and Families, in collaboration with the Early Head Start Research Consortium, found that three year-old Early Head Start children performed significantly better on a range of measures of cognitive, language, and social-emotional development than a randomly assigned control group. In addition, their parents scored significantly higher than control group parents on many aspects of the home environment and parenting behavior. Furthermore, Early Head Start programs had impacts on parents' progress toward self-sufficiency and on subsequent births. Early Head Start fathers benefited as well.

The findings have been used in a variety of ways, including congressional reports and briefings, conference presentations to both research and practice audiences, and information packets aimed at the practitioner audiences. The results were also used to design a performance measures framework for Head Start programs serving infants and toddlers.

Early Head Start plays an important role as a national laboratory for early childhood development programs. Head Start is now taking up the challenge to focus on measurable results for social competence and school-readiness in

young children. To initiate this effort, four major academic institutions and Head Start grantees around the country have formed Head Start Quality Research Centers which are piloting new approaches to measuring and collecting data. Head Start is also increasing investment in research that follows children and families over time and is collaborating with the National Academy of Sciences and the National Institutes of Health to develop strong scientific research on young children.

The Promise of Early Head Start

The overall results from the evaluation of the Early Head Start program are promising and provide lessons for program improvement and further development. Some examples include:

- Implementing the Head Start Program Performance Standards early and fully is important for maximizing impacts on children and families.
- Programs should continue to consider program options carefully. All program options can have impacts on children and families; however, programs that combine the features of home-based and center-based programs have the strongest impacts. Center-based programs can benefit by placing greater emphasis on parenting, parent-child relationships and family support. Home-based programs can benefit by emphasizing child cognitive and language development together with parenting and family support.

- Programs will need to explore new or alternative strategies for serving families who have large numbers of demographic risk factors.
- Programs that enroll families during pregnancy, or very early in the child's life, have the greatest chance to effect change.
- The study showed that Early Head Start programs can be successful with families that other intervention programs have not often affected. The program can build on these successes—with teen parents, parents showing depressive symptoms at baseline, fathers, later-born children and their parents, as well as children who are first-borns and their parents—to expand program services.
- The findings show that the program is able to have an impact across a wide range of child and parenting outcomes that bode well for children's future school success. The broad impacts on child development, combined with changes in parents' support for language and literacy (such as daily reading and enhanced literacy environments), provide a foundation that subsequent programs can build on to continue the Early Head Start gains.

The diversity of perspectives and interests that were generated by these local initiatives will continue to fuel the next generation of research in child development, which has only begun to investigate the forces impacting children living in poverty (Zigler & Styfco, 1993). There are still many challenges that lie ahead for creating a solid base of knowledge for programs serving low-income families with infants and toddlers. These include learning more about the

moderators of program impacts, the mediators of program effects, program quality, and about critical times for interventions (Raikes & Love, 2002).

Also of importance is the issue of child outcomes downstream. These are equally as important as the assessment of direct program impact during the birth to three years. Early Head Start needs to provide opportunities for children that create the structures for long-term changes (Robinson & Fitzgerald, 2002). The payoff for Early Head Start is to have children better prepared for all of life's transitions. Better prepared involves several factors such as children with better relationships with their parents, higher levels of self regulation and control, enhanced social competence and school readiness skills, and more stable connections with all their parent figures (Robinson & Fitzgerald, 2002). To assess the full impact of Early Head Start, therefore, it is essential to follow children longitudinally, testing models that take into account life-course events that maintain, facilitate, or interfere (Gottlieb, 1991) with pathways established during the family's Early Head Start experience (Robinson & Fitzgerald, 2002). Sites that participated in the national evaluation of Early Head Start are beginning to take steps to obtain this vital information (ACYF, 2002).

Research teams will continue to pursue outcome evaluation data as these Early Head Start children move through preschool and kindergarten into the early elementary years and beyond. So this is a scientific story whose ending may not be known for another decade, but it will be a decade well spent in determining the most effective ways to enhance developmental outcomes for an

extraordinarily large and vital resource in American society: children from low income families (Robison & Fitzgerald, 2002).

Setting for the Research:

A Brief Description of Venango County

Venango County Early Head Start is nestled in the beautiful hills of Oil City, Pennsylvania. Venango County is comprised of two cities, Franklin and Oil City, 9 boroughs and 20 second class townships. It consists of 675 square miles. The number of people per square mile is 85.3. The area has a rich historical past, as the birthplace of the oil industry. There are abundant natural attractions surrounded by beautiful forests.

At first glance, Venango County resembles many other rural counties in Pennsylvania. Some houses are fairly large single-family homes, while others are densely packed multiple-family dwellings on small plots of land. In some areas, the houses and lawns are well kept, while in others the houses are in varying states of disrepair. The exteriors of the more tired-looking houses belie the reality of the interiors; these dwellings made for one or two families often house several families at one time.

The major employment sectors include, i.e., industry categories for Venango County include education, health and social services (24.5% of jobs), manufacturing (19.8 % of jobs), and the retail trade industry (13.8 % of jobs). The majority of the Venango County workforce works in management, professional, and related occupations (25.5%); service occupations (24%); or

production, transportation, and material moving occupations (23.7%). The top employer in Venango County is the State of Pennsylvania, with 1,600 employees. The second largest employer is UPMC-Northwest Health Systems, with 1,215 employees (Oil Region Alliance of Business/Industry and Tourism, 2005).

The per capita income for Venango County as of 1999 was \$16,252.00; this is 22% lower than the state level and 25% lower than the national level. Similarly, the median household income for Venango County is 20% lower than state levels and 23% less than national levels. It should be noted that in 1998 Venango County had the seventh lowest median household income in the state (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

A number of problem areas are seen reflected in the demographic data from the past few decades. Since 1990, Venango County has experienced a 3.1% population decline; the population in 2000 was 57,000, and continues to fall (Census Bureau, 2000). The decline is attributed to the closing and scaling back of major employers, predominately in the oil and manufacturing industries. There is evidence to suggest that the trend in population will continue to decline here unless something compels individuals to stay in, or migrate to, the area.

The neighborhoods are economically diverse, including poor, low income, mid-income, and a few high income residents. There is limited public transportation for rural residents. Given that 60.3% of the population lives in a rural setting, lack of transportation is a major barrier to service access. Many low-income families do not have access to their own vehicle; according to the

2000 U.S. Census Bureau, Census, 8.6% of Venango County households do not have a vehicle. The cars that many families do have are usually old, often in need of repairs, and in driving condition only occasionally. County buses make only a few loops around the county per day, usually ending in late afternoon. This makes it difficult for many to get to work or complete their errands and appointments.

Several other negative trends exist that are representative of the economic deprivation that plagues the area. Oil City is challenged by several community-wide problems such as abandoned houses, joblessness, high school dropout rates, limited health care resources coupled with high teenage pregnancies, and drug and alcohol use (Venango County Outcome/Indicator Report, 2005). At the end of 2003 unemployment rates for Venango County was 6.3%. The unemployment rate for the state was 5% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Poverty is one of the most important indicators of family and child well being, because it is a predictor of so many other conditions (State of the Child, 2004). Unfortunately, the poverty levels for Venango County are high. Over 19.4% of all families live in poverty, 17.3% of families with children 17 and younger, and 24.7% of families with children 4 and younger live in poverty. In female headed households, many lacking a high school diploma and where no husband is present, the poverty level is 47.9 % when there are children 17 and younger, and a 70.2% when there are children 4 and younger (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

U.S. Census Data for 2003, released in November 2005, shows the number of people living below the poverty level continues to grow in most rural Pennsylvania counties. The figures point to a stubborn economic problem for this region: nearly one in every eight residents in the Venango County were living below the poverty line in 2003. The persistent poverty level is there despite modest increases in the median household income levels in the Venango County from 2000 to 2003, which listed at \$32,900 for Venango County. That is about \$400 higher than 2000.

But even with the upward nudge, the median income level did not rise above the \$33,000 level here and that kept it nearly \$10,000 below the state average. All of this reflects the same track as the nation, with the updated U.S. Census report showing the wealthiest counties are in suburban areas and the poorest ones are in rural regions. All the newest number crunching tells a depressing tale in this area: Venango County has a higher percentage of people in poverty than the state level (10.6%) and a lower median household than the Pennsylvania average (\$42,952). Specifically Venango County data includes the following: 19.9% of its children from infant to 17 years, or nearly 1 in 5 children, are living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003).

These demographics point to the need for the community to come together and work toward finding solutions that will make substantial differences in family well-being. A wide range of social supports are required to make a difference in the quality of families' lives and to improve their children's chances for a better future.

Role of the Focus on Our Future Collaborative Board

Around the country, communities are involved in finding ways to improve their health and well-being. Rather than relying on expert assessments of a community's health needs and expert models of health care and health promotion, these projects typically involve citizens defining the important dimensions of health for themselves, then work together to achieve their visions of a healthy community. The stakeholders involved in these efforts are central actors in establishing goals and objectives and in implementing action projects (Conner, 2005).

In 1994, a prevention oriented collaborative partnership, Focus on Our Future Collaborative Board (FOOFCB), was formed among individuals, parents, families, youth, organizations, businesses, and schools to work together to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families in Venango County. Its purpose also is to recommend direction regarding state directed and other initiatives that require community-wide collaboration as a condition of funding. Its membership totals over 80 members. This Board had a strong role in securing the initial Early Head Start grant and because of their strong investment in Early Head Start activities, concerns, and accomplishments, Venango County government designated FOOFCB as the governing body for Early Head Start.

Since the inception of FOOFCB, this group has provided several important functions for the community, such as: assessing community needs, advocating on behalf of families to improve access to services, facilitating collaboration and information sharing among the various systems that serve families, actively

working to build and strengthen the community's capacity to serve children and families, and evaluating the effectiveness of existing services. They have been an invaluable resource in working to effect change through collective action for the betterment of the entire community.

These citizens have stayed together for a long period of time as they work together to improve their community. They have demonstrated their commitment to work together toward community change. Throughout its 14-year history, FOOFCB has continued to work toward expanding program supports along with improving program quality and has established numerous relationships throughout the county. As these partnerships have deepened into collaborative working relationships, it has augmented and improved many social services needed for the families living in this community. This has led to FOOFCB being widely recognized and respected not only within Venango County but at the state level as well.

Members of the FOOFCB are also committed to the development of a process that would foster the creation of an evaluation culture among community service providers. As a result, they have requested members to participate in a performance measurement/outcomes evaluation process to insure that service providers are working in concert to achieve agreed upon community wide outcomes. By doing so, it further positions provider agencies to demonstrate the evaluation excellence required to meet the expectations of existing and potential new funding sources.

In order to prepare agencies to develop capacities to implement program evaluations, FOOFCB contracted with several experts in the field to provide workshops and seminars. Dr. Michael Patton, Dr. Ted Poister, and the University of Pittsburgh's Child Development office have provided numerous resources and expertise in guiding this process for Venango County human services. The overall goal is to develop a set of measures that will allow the community to track the progress they are making toward their vision of a healthy community. It was within this environment that this PAR dissertation with Early Head Start began to emerge.

Rationale for Venango County Early Head Start PAR Project

The Early Head Start program in Oil City, Pennsylvania serves 116 children with their families and offers comprehensive child development services through a home-based approach. Early Head Start is charged with tailoring their program services to meet the needs of low-income pregnant women and families with infants and toddlers in their communities. By working with children and their parents in their home for 90 minutes on a weekly basis, home visitors support parents as their child's primary teacher. Families can remain in the program until their child is three years old.

Locally, this Early Head Start PAR project's initial design began as a collaborative effort. The project's goal was to involve multiple stakeholders in designing a measurement scale to identify and measure long-term outcomes for Early Head Start in a manner that was meaningful to them. The close look at families' lives involved in this particular local Early Head Start program through

interactive participation from family members themselves, would help develop a series of questions about what they think is needed to affect outcomes for low income, high need families over the long term.

The idea for this project was developed in response to pressures from funding sources to find out what impacts Early Head Start was having on the families they served, not only in the short term but also longitudinally. Funding sources wanted credible descriptions of how Early Head Start influenced a broad array of outcomes for pregnant women, infants, toddlers, and their families.

Early Head Start has a commitment not simply to being involved in this PAR project, but historically has actively engaged in self-study and critical thinking about program development. Early Head Start employs a strength-based approach to enrolled families, focusing on family strengths rather than deficits, and emphasizing partnerships between families, staff, and community. Programs services are community based and help families achieve their own goals. Because of their collaborative approach, Early Head Start families were empowered to become active partners in this research, while the community, as a whole had the opportunity to become engaged through their multidimensional links to the Early Head Start program. It is in these ways Early Head Start's work most closely resembles a PAR approach.

Another strength-based aspect of Early Head Start is the Policy Council. The Head Start Program Performance Standard Sec.1304.50 requires agencies to establish and maintain a formal structure of shared governance through which parents can participate in policy making or in other decisions about the program.

This structure is made up of 51% of families currently enrolled in Early Head Start, and 49% of community members. Parents are true partners in Early Head Start programs. Each program has a formal structure of shared governance through which parents can participate in policymaking or in other decisions about the program. The Policy Council works in partnership with key management staff and the governing body. Participation in policy groups, parent committees, and governing bodies empowers parents and community members to share in the decision-making process.

Parents also have an opportunity to participate in the development of the program's curriculum and approach to child development and education, as well as the individualized plan for their own child's growth and development. The home culture and language of each family is supported in Early Head Start as an important aspect of early identity formation. Early Head Start programs provide opportunities for parents to enhance their parenting skills, knowledge, and understanding of the educational and developmental needs and activities of their children, as well as to share observations and concerns about their children with program staff.

Early Head Start offers parents opportunities for their own growth and support in identifying and meeting goals. Families and staff collaboratively design and routinely update individualized family partnership agreements to ensure that service delivery strategies are responsive to the individual goals and ideals of families. All of the components of this structure fit well with the philosophy of PAR.

Venango County administration therefore had multiple interests in generating energy for this project. They were funding a program that has the potential to make positive long term-impacts for pregnant women, infants, and toddlers in their county. They had a commitment to strengthen Early Head Start in order for it to work well, but they also were aware of the pressures for effective performance measures and evidence of what was working for this program. And finally, through multiple discussions with me, regarding alternative evaluation approaches that can make a difference in the lives of those served in their county, they were interested in pursuing a PAR approach in designing a measurement tool that had the capability of increasing local voice in decision-making processes.

Also, as Venango County is a rural area, the process of resolving problems needs to be given as much attention as the product, therefore, this was an opportunity to build on local strengths and broaden community participation. As a result, they were willing to engage in a relationship with me, a doctoral student, to facilitate this project. The next chapter discusses in detail the PAR story.

CHAPTER FIVE

PROJECT NARRATIVE

Introduction

In the following sections, I describe, in narrative form, the story of PAR with Early Head Start mothers and what occurred during our eight months together. This PAR research is recounted in narrative form regarding specific situations with specific connections between people and events. I chose to present this story in narrative form in order to honor the co-researchers' stories. These data will stand on their own as descriptions of their experiences encountered and will illuminate dimensions of human experiences to reveal larger meanings. Furthermore, it highlights the uniqueness of each human action and event. The narratives capture the PAR experiences as a way of organizing key events in a meaningful manner. The connections of these events over time offer insight into how a PAR focus can sensitize us to look at meaning and process at both the subjective and social levels.

My involvement with Early Head Start began two years prior to the acceptance of my dissertation proposal. In order to deepen the understanding of the social context for this PAR project, I begin by describing my initial association with Early Head Start. I then tell the story of the PAR project itself as it emerged through several key events during the eight months of this research process. Quotes from the co-researchers and case examples of the key events are used to articulate elements of the project that specifically illuminate the research questions. This lays the foundation for the findings presented in Chapter Six.

Initial Connections with Early Head Start

My immediate point of entry into Early Head Start was through Community Services of Venango County, Inc. Early Head Start is one of the many programs funded through this agency. I was involved in this agency in many ways and my participation increased over time. My initial involvement with Community Services began in May 2002 when, as a doctoral student, I began my field project with Early Head Start.

My contact with Community Services of Venango County's Early Head Start Program began when the Venango County Human Services Grant Administrator for the program contacted me in January 2002. She discussed their interest in developing a measurement instrument to evaluate the long-term outcomes of program participants. I was in the process of finding a field project for the doctoral program at this time and was interested in spending time with her to further discuss this project.

The Early Head Start Administrator developed this project in response to pressures from funding sources to find out what impacts Early Head Start was having on the families they served, not only in the short term but also longitudinally. Funding sources wanted credible descriptions of how Early Head Start influenced a broad array of outcomes for pregnant women, infants, toddlers, and their families. Although the Head Start Bureau has established very clear performance standards for all Early Head Start programs, each program was given significant latitude to develop its own model of service delivery. In addition, each program was strongly encouraged to evaluate the processes and outcomes

of its unique model of service delivery, such that more effective strategies could be replicated in both this program and in others serving similar populations.

The Venango Early Head Start program thus needed to create the mechanisms for capturing long-term changes. The program collected a significant amount of data, but did not have the capacities to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of their services. The Early Head Start Grant Administrator recognized their data system was not well developed and initiated this project to improve their outcome measurement efforts.

The Grant Administrator, Agency Executive Director, Early Head Start Director, and I met to review their initial draft of the tool. I agreed to facilitate the continued development of this project and contacted the Director of the Applied Research at Indiana University of Pennsylvania to support us with developing an effective measurement tool, along with data collection procedures and analysis. We met with him to clarify his role in the project and arranged to work collaboratively during my field project with the different stakeholders to:

- Continue to develop, refine, and finalize the instrument;
- Develop protocols for administration of the tool;
- Validate the tool;
- Locate software program for data input;
- Identify statistical applications for data analysis and interpretation;
- Provide ongoing training and supervision of the Early Head Start home visitors in the administration of the instrument; and,
- Pilot study of the instrument.

It was important for me to comprehend as fully possible the approaches (strategies, activities, and culture) that Early Head Start takes in delivering services. Thus, I reviewed studies on the evaluation of Early Head Start in the existing literature and familiarized myself with the federal performance standards, program policies, procedures, and charts to gain a deeper understanding of this Early Head Start Program.

The Early Head Start Director provided opportunities for me to meet with different stakeholders from a variety of settings in order to gain their perspective on this project. For example, she approached the parents from the Policy Council, explained the reason for the instrument, and how important it is for them to be involved. She asked for volunteers to begin working with us; several parents came forward.

We held further discussions at staff meetings, Early Head Start socialization groups, Policy Council meetings, and collaborative board meetings. We set a timeline for Early Head Start to initiate the use of this instrument in the Fall of 2002, and use it with their total program population of 116 participants. Of this sample, 20 participants were contacted to complete this instrument for the pilot study. Once this was completed, we met to improve the instrument and finalize it for the main project.

After many iterations of the measurement tool, the pilot study was conducted. However, several technical and methodological problems appeared after the home visitors began using the tool. We came back together to review their concerns. We scheduled several meetings with Early Head Start

Administration and staff to get a better picture of where the roadblocks were coming from.

These meetings were very productive and provided insight into why things were not moving forward as originally planned. By slowing down and getting a better view of all the perspectives, a stronger foundation emerged for a more collaborative project overall. Some of the challenges that came to view were:

- Different perspectives and confusion existed regarding how the Early Head Start staff should gather the data from families. For example, the Early Head Start supervisor wanted it to occur over a six week observation period without family input. Other members of the committee felt it was essential that families take an active role in providing the data about their lives.
- The Early Head Start staff felt the tool was too long and they needed more clarity about some of the data collected.
- The Early Head Start Director expressed that we needed to find ways to encourage more Policy Council involvement in this project.
- Other staff stated that it was hard for them to collect data regarding difficult subjects with the families, such as drugs and alcohol, mental health issues, domestic violence.
- The Early Head Start Program supervisor expressed his concern that the program already was inundated with paperwork and did not want to burden staff with any unnecessary additional paperwork.

- All felt the tool was built around a deficit model and they did not feel comfortable using this language around the families they were serving.

All of these ideas and discussions helped us see that a different direction was needed if an effective instrument was to be developed. We scheduled meetings to reconstruct the scale using a strengths perspective with the involvement of all stakeholders, including administrators, staff, and families. This changed the time-line significantly but opened space for further significant dialogue about how to develop a more useful tool as well as the importance of having all key stakeholders at the table.

My field project was coming to an end, but the interest in the project continued to evolve. A retreat day was scheduled by the Grant Administrator that included multiple stakeholders to devise a new direction for the tool. I also continued working with them. It was time to think about a dissertation project and my involvement in this field project provided me with the opportunity to continue this work. I wanted to connect my research to the needs and interests of this community.

From this context, I designed my dissertation as a PAR project with Early Head Start parents, Early Head Start practitioners, and community stakeholders coming together to collaboratively design a measurement scale to identify and measure long-term outcomes in a manner that was meaningful to multi-stakeholders. The dissertation itself would explore the PAR participants' experiences of shifts in voice and perceptions of power through the process.

Critical Event with the Institutional Review Board

My dissertation committee approved my dissertation on March 17, 2004. I then submitted my protocol to the IRB for review. They determined that a full board review was necessary and scheduled a meeting for April 21, 2004. And then, shortly before this meeting occurred, I accepted a position as Executive Director of the same agency that oversees the Early Head Start program. This was a major concern for the IRB due to concerns about dual-role conflict.

During this meeting, my promotion to Executive Director was a major concern for the IRB and led to much discussion. I received a letter dated May 5, 2004 (see Appendix F) requesting further clarification and revisions to my protocol prior to approval. Central areas to be addressed included addressing dual relationships, providing an explanation of how I would remain separate in my role as Executive Director and PAR researcher, discussing safeguards to staff under my supervision during the study, and assurance of anonymity so I would not know the participants involved. In regards to anonymity, they wrote:

Create and explain in detail a complete two-group process. The one group will be the actual participants and the second group will not be part of the study. Describe what safeguards will be in place so the researcher does not know who participated in the study.

I found some of their concerns and proposed solutions to be contradictory and ill-suited to the dissertation proposal I submitted. However, I responded in detail to their questions. In regards to dual relationship concerns, I attempted to clarify the checks and balances already provided within the federal regulations of

Early Head Start to protect staff from any employment risks. For example, the Early Head Start Performance Standard 1304.50(d) (1) (x) and (xi) states: (x) Policy Council will be included in decisions to hire or terminate the Early Head Start Director of the grantee or delegate agency; and (xi) Policy Council will be included in decisions to hire or terminate any person who works primarily for the Early Head Start program of the grantee or delegate agency. I stated that these would also apply to any early Head Start staff that chose to participate as co-researchers in this project.

I also explained that while the Early Head Start Director was under my supervision, the rest of the staff reported to her or other program coordinators. No more than 20% of my time was allocated to the Early Head Start program. I met with both the Governing Board of Directors as well as the Early Head Start staff to clarify that my role in this research was as a doctoral student and not as Executive Director. This language was also used in the informed consent.

To further protect staff and families who chose to become co-researchers, I stressed that all participants would receive an orientation on the principles of PAR. These include:

- Participation;
- Critical dialogue;
- Democracy;
- Knowledge generation;
- Reflective practice;
- Human flourishing;

- Power; and,
- Social change.

I stated that this process would be carried out openly, and group members themselves would be involved in identifying safeguards to handle concerns through use of the PAR principles.

Finally, I addressed their concerns regarding anonymity. Anonymity could not be part of my protocol because it was incompatible with PAR. I stated that all of the families and the staff involved in Early Head Start could freely choose to participate in the project in a number of ways, or choose not to participate at all.

I explained that when the orientation meeting was held, those who came opted to be there. Once the co-research team was formed, as a member of the team myself I would have to know who chose to participate in the study. This was a team approach; all members were fully informed. How we proceeded from there was negotiated.

Having the co-researchers involvement from the beginning was important for building trust and developing a sense of engagement and ownership among all partners; it provided a good foundation for a respectful partnership to guide the study. The final team would collaborate as co-researchers in this project.

I sent these revisions to the IRB on May 24, 2004(see Appendix G) and received a response on June 29, 2004(see Appendix F). The co-chairperson stated that the IRB evaluated my proposed research project on June 16, 2004, and then again on June 21, 2004 to finalize the Board's recommendations. The

project was denied again due to continued concerns with dual role conflict, social/economic risks, closeness to research participants, and conflict of interest.

In regards to continual concerns with dual role conflict, they believed my leadership role in the agency was undeniable. They stated:

She is likely to have an indirect or informal influence over staffing decisions even though she has no formal control over them. It is reasonable to expect that this would lead to a perception by employees that staffing and programmatic decisions are within the scope of her employment, thus leading to the existence of a dual role.

They stated that in my written correspondence I did not provide clear protections against the greater than minimal social/economic risks for staff whether they chose to participate in the research or if they refused to participate in the research. They also believed that because my research design included a high level of closeness and direct contact with the research participants, I needed to provide greater distance between us, given the nature of my dual role with the agency.

They also questioned my ability to avoid the perception of a conflict of interest and my ability to remain unbiased. This remained an issue for them. They listed *The American Sociological Association's Code of Ethics*, *The American Psychological Association Code of Ethical Principles and Code of Conduct*, and a book by Celia Fisher (2003), *Decoding the Ethics Code: A Practical Guide for Psychologists* as additional guidance related to this ethical standard.

Finally, their recommendation was that my dissertation committee and I should come up with an alternative to my proposed research project. They recommended that I either conduct an action research project with a different agency in another county or that I redesign my study so that I am not involving my organization's employees in the action research project.

Their concerns suggested to me that significant gaps exist between PAR research values and approach and IRB's understanding about this type of research. While accepting and understanding the need for human subject review, and appreciating the amount of time the IRB committee took to try to understand the PAR approach, it became clear to me their application of review procedures and requirements do not conceptualize research in a PAR format. I made another attempt to address this difference in our perspectives.

I agreed with the IRB that there were some minimal risks. One was that this study involved power issues, seeking to equalize the dialogue among stakeholders in developing a long-term outcomes tool for Early Head Start families. There was a risk of creating animosity among research participants, the antithesis of my reasons for initiating this action research project.

Also, my role as Executive Director could create a potential risk for staff choosing to become involved as co-researchers. There could be concerns on their part regarding job security or effects on their performance evaluation as a result of their involvement. However, I would assure them verbally and in writing that my role in this research is as a doctoral student and not as the Executive Director. The Early Head Start regulations previously mentioned provide

protection and distance from the Executive Director being able to fire any Early Head Start staff directly. However, my main argument was that the entire PAR relationship is based on active co-determination and no action would be taken without agreement among all the collaborators.

I also included potential benefits. One was that by developing processes for effective stakeholder inclusion and voice, meaningful interaction and dialogue could lead to the possibilities of democratizing action and change. By participating in the project rather than just receiving the results second hand, the findings would become more meaningful and useful to the participants.

Another benefit was the partnerships among the myriad of stakeholders. This could increase the capacity to generate relevant knowledge from those in a position to know their conditions better than traditional researchers. The participants would also have the opportunity to share the results with the National Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project funded by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Finally, I stated that the benefits for the participants to have the opportunity to be involved in a research project from beginning to end, and learn valuable skills that could lead to changes in their community far outweighed the potential risks of their involvement.

However, protections that I built in against these greater than minimal risks were not sufficient enough for the IRB. They still felt that the potential harm of this situation was too great of a risk and denied Early Head Start staff

involvement in the project. Specifically, they stated that their main concern was that if, during the PAR project, an Early Head Start staff member was fired for something totally unrelated to the project, it could be perceived that the firing occurred because of their involvement or non-involvement in the project. This could result in holding the University liable. In their opinion, they were not convinced that I could avoid the perception of a conflict of interest and that my ability to remain unbiased was still an issue for them.

The project received final IRB approval on August 24, 2004(see Appendix F), five months after my dissertation committee approved my proposal. I decided to revise the IRB protocol to only include Early Head Start parents and community stakeholders. Early Head Start staff, initial partners in developing the outcomes tool, were excluded from the project.

When I told the Early Head Start staff I could not get IRB approval for their involvement in the dissertation, the Early Head Start Director was visibly upset. She stated she wanted her staff to have the opportunity to participate in the study of their own context; they had spent considerable time up to this point and several expressed an interest in continuing their involvement through this research process. She discussed writing a letter to the IRB because she could not understand how they could keep them from being involved and participating as co-researchers in their own context. While that was an option for her, I told her I was not able to allow their participation if I wanted to do my dissertation work at this agency.

While I believed there were important arguments for inclusion of staff in the project, I could not persuade the IRB. My dissertation was approved upon this condition and so I began the journey without them. This set the stage for tensions between the Early Head Start program and me that grew in magnitude over the next several months. This was a critical event that will be addressed later in this chapter.

Beginning of Participatory Action Research Project

On September 7, 2004, I received final approval from the IRB to begin my research. I attempted to begin this PAR project that fall, however, due to the demands of my new position, I could not devote the time needed to begin the project and made the decision to begin in January 2005.

Relationships are central to PAR projects. Therefore in order to initiate this PAR work, I needed to create space for relationships to develop. In the following section, I describe in some detail our first weeks together as co-researchers in a PAR project.

First Weeks as a Group

On January 28, 2005, four Early Head Start mothers met with me to begin our PAR project. We convened on the third floor conference room in the Transit Building which houses many of Community Services programs, including Early Head Start. The co-researchers initially met each other through their involvement with the Early Head Start program, specifically as members of the Policy Council and Parent Committee. Participation in these activities

empowered these mothers to become co-researchers with me. They all strongly expressed their families benefited from participation in the program and wanted to find ways to share these experiences with other Early Head Start families.

Joan stated:

I want other Early Head Start families to understand why their involvement in the program is so important; it's for their good and their children's good.

I'd like to tell them how Early Head Start has worked for me.

My approach to building relationships in this context meant that I refrained from pre-defining the areas the Early Head Start mothers discussed. It was my intent to initiate this process from the beginning. Their initial conversations were representative of their realities and served as the basis for our work as we moved forward. I hoped that by shifting the control of the discussions to the participants, they would be better able to "name their worlds" (Friere, 1970), ultimately extending the discussions to include power and voice.

I used these group sessions to draw on the experiences of these Early Head Start mothers. Many times during these early group sessions, the participants made meaning of their worlds without direct input from me. For example, their early discussions moved from talking about some of the antics of their children and eventually centered on some concerns they all were experiencing in this community such as financial difficulties. Amy adds:

Times are tough for a lot of us in this County. We don't even make \$12,000 right now. My boyfriend makes a little more than \$10,000,

maybe. We get food stamps and anything that supplements our income. We can't live on this without support.

There was also a willingness to offer suggestions right from the beginning about how we should get started. When I presented an initial draft of a letter to go out to invite other Early Head Start parents to join us, I received immediate feedback: "This is too wordy, too academic; if I got this in the mail, I'd toss it in the garbage!" This was followed with input on how to re-write it and how the format needed to change. They took charge and divided responsibilities on getting the next draft back to the group.

There was a great deal of dialogue about how to manage our time together and what materials were needed to keep themselves organized such as binders, dividers, pens, etc. They also asked if we could eat our meal prior to the meeting. Next, we collectively determined what day of the week would be best to work together. After agreeing to meet weekly on Mondays on the third floor of the Transit Building, we set 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. as our time together.

During our group meetings, I needed to record as fully and as fairly as possible the co-researchers perspectives. I explained to them that I wanted to tape record what they were saying so I did not miss any of it. I clarified how I would use the recorder and also made it clear that I would turn it off any time they requested it. This led to questions about who would hear what was said. I told them my Administrative Assistant would type the conversations and asked if they wanted to talk with her. They stated they did, so she joined us and answered all of their questions. These included: "Will you discuss this information

with anyone besides this group? Where will you keep the transcripts?” I informed them they would have access to the transcripts also. I stressed the importance of how valuable their input was from the beginning and this included their involvement in all aspects throughout the project.

From my early conceptualization of this project, I sought ways to compensate the mothers for the work they would be doing with this group. My reasons for compensating the mothers were practical and philosophical. First, I knew times were hard in the community. Opportunities for the mothers to make money were few and far between. Second, if my work was being rooted in a philosophy of collaborative, participatory work, and I was getting paid through my position at the Agency, then these mothers should get paid also for their contributions. This project would be demanding of their time and their economic situations were very difficult, to say the least.

Community Service’s governing board supported this project from the beginning and believed it would benefit the Agency overall. After I discussed compensation with them, they approved a \$5.00 Wal-Mart card for each hour they were at a meeting, along with meals, childcare, and transportation if needed. The expenses were divided in three ways. Community Services paid for the Wal-Mart cards, Early Head Start compensated travel and any childcare, and I bought the meals. All of the mothers were very appreciative of this support; Amy commented, “good, I can get some diapers on my way home; I really need them.

Agenda Setting

I planned to structure our work in alignment with the principles and practices of PAR. Therefore, I organized some of our early discussions around these principles that guided our work. While I facilitated this particular learning process, I strove to locate myself as a partner to this project. Although I began as the facilitator, I stressed that I wanted them to take part in facilitation of meetings also.

I introduced each PAR principle, attempting to elicit their concerns and openly shared that it took some time for me to learn these principles, and I still did not have all the answers. I acknowledged the ambiguity of this approach and affirmed that we could trust our capacity to learn this together. I asked them to continue to work with me and shared how important their involvement was. I assured them that we could go at whatever pace they felt comfortable with; that it was important for them to ask questions and slow me down whenever necessary.

At the end of each meeting, we reviewed what we covered and discussed different ideas for the next agenda. In the beginning, we all had access to the Internet and e-mail. Mary volunteered to take the ideas, put them into an agenda, and e-mail them to us to review before the next meeting. This occurred for about a month until Amy told us her Internet services were discontinued and her printer was out of ink. We continued to collectively reflect on our progress, revised our work as necessary, and jointly developed meeting agendas before we left each meeting. I took the responsibility of typing and printing the agenda

for the next meetings as I had access to the needed resources to make this happen.

Opportunity to Build Community Partnerships

The Early Head Start mothers told me how important it was for them to be prepared before they got involved with the community. In order for the co-researchers to ask other community members to join us in our PAR project, it was important for them to gain more knowledge about the many different areas of their program. They wanted to know not only what was going on locally but nationally as well. A national evaluation of Early Head Start was completed and they were interested in the results.

The four co-researchers decided that since the Focus On Our Future Collaborative Board was representative of many of the non-profit agencies and school districts in Venango County, we should ask to do a presentation for this group as a way of recruiting members to join the project and/or dissertation. This group meets monthly and has a membership of over 80 members. This Board had a strong role in securing the initial Early Head Start grant, and because of their strong investment in Early Head Start activities, concerns, and accomplishments, Venango County government designated it as the governing body for Early Head Start. As a member of this board for many years, I was assigned to getting our presentation on the agenda for April 2005.

The co-researchers then began to plan their presentation to this board. The National Head Start Evaluation project was available to us as a power-point presentation and they wanted to take time to become familiar with these results.

Discussions focused on ways to share this information with the Collaborative Board. Our goal was fourfold: (1) show them what is happening with Early Head Start nationally; (2) share what we are seeing within our local Early Head Start program; (3) discuss the plan to engage in a PAR project to develop a measurement tool to track our outcomes longitudinally; and, (4) invite them to join our PAR team.

This was an opportunity for us to build on pre-existing partnership and be an avenue to extend the partnership throughout the research process. We were asking for their involvement, not as experts, but as an opportunity to begin to extend the principles of PAR into the local community.

It was now the end of February 2005, and we had six weeks before the presentation. They were eager and anxious to do a good job. I felt my role shifting as they took the lead in making decisions on how to design their work. For example, Amy thought some of the words on the power-point slide were too complicated and she wanted to re-write them; Joan volunteered to prepare half of the presentation and Amy agreed to do the other half. Sara stated that she was absolutely not ready to talk in front of such a large group; she was willing to help with the preparation and would run the power-point from the computer. Mary was enrolled in college courses and she was unable to miss her class on that day, so her role was helping to prepare the presentation and giving feedback as the others practiced their parts. I was given the role of wrapping up the presentation, giving an overview of PAR and my dissertation.

We prepared and practiced for six weeks, ending with a rehearsal presentation at the site of the meeting, the Salvation Army, in order to become comfortable with the size of the room, position of tables, where they would stand, and where the power-point projector would be located. They practiced with the microphone and finally felt they were organized and ready to go. There were also questions around what to wear; it was important for them to look good. They all felt they had decent clothes to wear. They also discussed sharing a personal success story about their involvement with Early Head Start. It was decided that each one could decide how comfortable they felt that day if they wanted to share a story.

Co-Researchers' Presentation

On April 14, 2005 the co-researchers arrived early and anxious since speaking in front of a public group was a new experience for them. Lunch is always served first so that helped ease their nerves some. There were several items on the agenda before their presentation. The time finally came and Joan took her place at the podium while Sara went to the back of the room to operate the equipment for the the power-point presentation to the 40 members present that day. When Joan was finished with her section, Amy stepped up to share her part of the presentation. It was then time to share a personal story on our agenda, and I was not sure how this was going to be presented. Joan came back to the podium and eloquently shared her Early Head Start experiences, followed by Sara, who indicated earlier that she was not ready to speak to a group this size. She spoke from the heart and gave a moving story on how as a single teen

parent she has grown through the services provided through Early Head Start. Amy chose not to share a story. I then presented an overview of the PAR project, and Joan came back to invite all of the members to join our PAR team. The members of the collaborative board applauded us and the chairperson thanked us for coming. We left letters and response sheets for all members present and additional letters were sent to members that were not present that day. Now it was time to wait for their responses.

Setback and Stabilization

Despite all of the recruiting effort by the co-researchers, no one from the collaborative board volunteered to join our team. This was the first time they spoke to a group of over 40 people and they felt so proud of their presentation. I observed a visible emotion of powerlessness when the co-researchers heard the news that no one from the collaborative board wanted to join our team, as they expressed feeling ineffective in bringing others to the table. They saw themselves as having raised their voices only to experience defeat in a space where they thought they would be heard. During this session, the co-researchers expressed their feelings of powerlessness, being torn between giving up and wanting to find another way to make a difference. Following are parts of their conversations when they first heard the news.

Mary responded quietly: "I can't believe we didn't get anybody to join us." Joan followed with her question: "so nobody on the collaborative board wanted to sit on our committee?" Sara added: "It's just hard to take; I don't know what to

do. I feel angry 'cause its like I don't know what to do. I just feel helpless cause now it seems so overwhelming."

Amy joins in:

Like how are we going to go out and make a difference? I mean I'm not trying to put us all down and say we can't do it without them but this really hurts. You know, like what can I do now? At some point I was feeling hopeful, but now I'm feeling helpless.

Joan agrees: "I feel the same way but whose gonna do it if we don't? That's what my question is." Mary jumps in: "I'm disappointed too; but I feel strong enough about this and I honestly think we need to keep moving on. I think doing the focus groups with the parents next week will energize us and that should help." Amy responds: "I guess I'll keep coming."

I observed that while they were struggling with feelings of powerlessness, some co-researchers were able to convince the others to keep moving forward in order to make a difference. They recovered a sense of their capacity to act and mobilize to get their issues heard.

Reaching Out to Collaborative Board Members

We continued to meet weekly, discussed the direction of our project and made future plans based on mutual agreement. We developed reflections based on our experiences drawn from prior actions to try to understand them in new ways. Over time and through reflective opportunities, the co-researchers indicated they felt more confident in our work and wondered if there were things we could do differently to get better participation. One area they discussed

looking at in a different light was the collaborative board. Since one of the trainings we attended was on focus groups, Mary suggested that we try to have a focus group with some members of the collaborative board. She remarked that it was important to have their input on some level. She stated: “Even though our first request didn’t work, maybe this one would.” We all agreed this was a great idea. We reviewed the membership list and chose 15 names to invite. We chose these members because of their significant leadership and involvement with the collaborative board since its inception in 1994. Since I had a professional relationship with most of these members, I offered to extend this invitation and the co-researchers agreed with this arrangement.

We then spent a considerable amount of time developing the questions we wanted to ask them. Mary wrote everyone’s questions on the board, erased some and re-wrote some until we agreed with the results. We decided to take the questions home and think about them for another week. The following week, we reviewed the changes and additional questions. We agreed on 10 questions to ask the collaborative board members.

Next, the co-researchers discussed who would facilitate the focus group. Joan had a vacation planned for that week, Amy worked. That left Mary, Sara, and me. Mary offered to co-facilitate the group, but did not want to do it by herself. Sara agreed to be the other co-facilitator, and I was asked to take notes.

On June 24, 2005, we held a two hour focus group with 10 members of the Focus on the Future Collaborative Board in the conference room on the third floor of the Transit Building. One of the questions asked for ideas on how to find

ways to encourage collaborative board members to work with us on the Early Head Start PAR project. Mary took the lead with this question, and added:

We were disappointed when no members from the collaborative board joined us in our research after our presentation in April. But what you have to say is important to us, so we thought we'd try again through a focus group. We really appreciate that you took the time to come today.

After a few minutes of silence, the Charitable Trust Administrator stated: "Having this focus group is a better way for me to give input." The Child-Care Information System Director replied: "I do think we need to re-look at the collaborative board's responsibilities to Early Head Start." Several other members made recommendations to take to the next collaborative board meeting. They discussed how their role as Governing Board for Early Head Start had become unclear and that they needed to re-define their responsibilities and take them more seriously. The Child Development Director suggested that the monthly Early Head Start program report needed to have a primary place on the agenda and not mixed in with task force reports.

The questions then centered on the collaborative board's role as the Governing Board for Early Head Start and how to make it more effective. The Mental Health/Mental Retardation Administrator, also the chairperson for the collaborative board, recommended that a specific smaller group needed to be assigned as Governing Board to look at how governance was being carried out. She suggested this smaller group also needed to get involved with the analysis

of the PAR project data; it was important for them to see what Early Head Start parents are saying about their program. She continued:

We need to sit down with what the parents say they want and really take a look at it and listen to them and then try to give them what they are looking for. If it's not meeting their needs, or not working, we need to do it different. We need to make sure we're meeting what the parents are looking for; we have to listen to them to find out what they want.

This focus group with the collaborative board was successful in strengthening the social relationship between the co-researchers and the collaborative board members present. The focus group ended with mutual commitments and joint efforts between the participants. I will discuss one of these joint efforts in the following section.

Expanding the Network

A significant outcome of the focus group with the collaborative board members was an invitation by the Mental Health/Mental Retardation Administrator for our group to become members of the evaluation committee of the collaborative board. Members included the Mental Health/Mental Retardation Administrator, Early Head Start Grant Administrator, Human Service Director, Early Head Start Director, Charitable Trust Administrator, a Parent Representative, and me. The overall goal of this committee was to help agencies develop capacities to implement program evaluation.

In order to prepare agencies to move in the direction of program evaluations, this committee contracted with several experts in the field to provide

workshops and seminars. Michael Quinn Patton, Ph.D, a noted qualitative evaluation methods researcher, Ted Poister, Ph.D, a prominent performance measurement and applied statistics researcher and several distinguished faculty from the University of Pittsburgh's Child Development Office, provided numerous resources and expertise in guiding this process for Venango County human services.

The co-researchers and I attended an evaluation committee meeting on May 23, 2005. During that time, the evaluation committee discussed several different ideas and approaches to developing evaluations. The Early Head Start Grant Administrator suggested that the Early Head Start PAR project could serve as a pilot project as one approach to evaluation to share with other human service providers. The Charitable Trusts Administrator recommended that our PAR team provide a monthly report of our progress to this group. The co-researchers and I agreed to this recommendation.

Also, the Mental Health/Mental Retardation Administrator asked us to attend an Evaluation Symposium presented by the University of Pittsburgh's Child Development Office. She wanted us to decide if the trainers at this seminar would be effective trainers to bring to our county for more evaluation training. Two co-researchers, Mary and Joan, attended this training with me. At the next scheduled meeting, the co-researchers shared that they felt these trainers would provide valuable training for our county. The Mental Health/Mental Retardation Administrator stated that there was funding for this

training to occur and we were asked to make arrangements for the training to take place in October 2005.

Meeting with Early Head Start grant administrator. Early Head Start families responded favorably to our request for focus groups and individual interviews. As we began to finalize the questions we wanted to ask them, Joan wondered if we could invite the Early Head Start Grant Administrator to meet with us, give us some feedback on our questions, and possibly suggest other ones. Sara liked this idea and added, “she seems like a nice lady; it would be good to get to know her better. I’ve met her before but never spent much time talking with her.” I called her from that meeting and she graciously accepted the invitation to attend on May 27, 2005.

As mentioned in earlier sections, the Early Head Start Administrator was a key stakeholder in the development of the Early Head Start program and was very interested in tracking long-term outcomes. She attended this meeting and worked collaboratively with the co-researchers on forming and revising questions for the Early Head Start families. She listened to their different perspectives on why they thought certain questions needed to be asked, and in turn, the co-researchers asked for her ideas. This meeting allowed all participants an opportunity to engage actively in planning the questions needed to capture the voices of the Early Head Start families. The co-researchers developed a working relationship with the Early Head Start Administrator where the decisions about the questions were genuinely developed and mutually agreed upon. Succeeding

in achieving this outcome was an enriching experience and established a climate for continued collaborative problem-solving.

Engaging in Learning Communities

Once we became comfortable with ourselves as a PAR group, the focus turned to the importance of gaining knowledge regarding the areas we would be addressing in this project and the dissertation. A significant amount of our time together was spent learning not only about aspects of the project, but also learning from each other. We were coming together once a week for two hours with a commitment to be prepared to carry out the project and share it with the community. Gaining many of the skills and competencies needed to carry out this project involved a slower pace than I initially anticipated. But as Joan reflected, “we can’t go and speak to groups of people if we’re not prepared.”

We planned a schedule that involved various training opportunities. For instance, we sent a letter to all Early Head Start families indicating several ways they could become involved with us. The list included participating in a focus group. As we started to get responses back, many of the families checked focus group participation. As Sara looked over the responses, she asked: “Just what will we be doing with a focus group? What questions will we ask?” We decided we needed to find focus group training before we met with these families.

Several of the families indicated that they wanted us to come to their home for interviews. We were very pleased with their responses. The co-researchers made it clear that they wanted to include all of the parents’ voices in this project. For example, Sara added: “there’s probably good, bad and ugly out

there and it's going to be presented; it might be difficult for some to hear it but it will be heard."

As discussed in Chapter Four, members of the collaborative board were committed to preparing agencies to develop capacities to implement program evaluations. As a result, they requested members to participate in a variety of trainings and seminars. In order for us to prepare develop these capacities also, we brainstormed areas in which we wanted training. Our topics included developing a logic model, performance indicators and measurement, surveys, individual interviewing skills and questions, and understanding the principles of PAR as we conducted our research.

Several events took place that covered many of these areas of interest. These included a community forum that focused on evaluation, poverty, and school-community connection, a consultation with Michael Patton, Ph.D. on evaluation planning, and an evaluation symposium that covered logic models, focus groups, and survey design. The co-researchers attended all of these trainings and seminars. Sara remarked: "The knowledge that we've gained is valuable knowledge—I'm making a contribution and it's not just fluff; it's important information."

I was particularly interested in their thoughts about spending a day with Dr. Patton. The Focus On Our Future Collaborative Board Planning Committee invited him to spend a day in Venango County working with human service providers on developing performance evaluations. At the end of the day participants had time to ask questions relative to their own evaluation efforts.

Mary stated that all the discussions we had on outcomes and indicators during the past months made her feel comfortable talking in this setting:

His work related to what we are doing in the sense that he was talking about outcomes. He felt that our county outcomes were too broad; he said we need to identify outcomes differently for each group. He also was talking about long term outcomes. Since that's what we are trying to do, I was able to share our project with the rest of the group.

Joan stated:

What I liked about Patton's discussion was the idea of a team approach because sometimes we have so many agencies involved with our families it gets so confusing. He took the time to listen to what we were saying; I felt like I had something important to contribute.

We continued our weekly meetings while we attended workshops. The co-researchers completed several actions that included: (1) a presentation to the collaborative board; (2) focus group with the collaborative board; (3) joining the evaluation committee; and, (4) inviting the Early Head Start Grant Administrator to assist us with developing questions for the focus groups and individual interviews with Early Head Start families. They then turned their attention to scheduling focus groups and individual interviews with Early Head Start families and Early Head Start staff. Each of these events is discussed in some detail.

Interviews with Early Head Start Families

During May, June and July, 2005, the co-researchers and I conducted four focus groups with 26 participants and eight individual interviews with 11 Early

Head Start parents. For the families that attended the focus groups, transportation and child care was made available, as well as a meal during our time together. We went as a team of two to each interview.

Prior to starting the interviews, the co-researchers discussed providing a gift for the families who participated. They all felt it was important to show the families their appreciation for their involvement with us. We eventually decided on books for the children and a variety of summer items that families could choose from after the interview or focus group was completed.

The co-researchers expressed how important it was for the voices of other families in the program be heard in order to make a difference. They approached the interviews with respect for others, dignity, and concern for their welfare as evidenced by how carefully they planned the interview times. The families shared their concerns with the co-researchers as well as offering some solutions to improve services. The co-researchers believed they shared a connection with these families because of their involvement in the same program. Joan explained:

When we go into the homes to do the interviews, we do it as a team.

We're getting good information because we can say, I'm in this program too, and that happened to me, or I understand, and it's just a whole different way of being heard.

The co-researchers listened to the families with the hope that their voices would be heard. As Sara remarked: "We don't want their voices to be lost."

Focus Groups with Early Head Start Staff

While Early Head Start staff could not be involved in the PAR dissertation because of the IRB's concerns regarding dual-relationship, the co-researchers wanted to interview them for the PAR project. They scheduled and coordinated two focus groups and I chose not to present for either one. First of all, I was cognizant of the IRB's concerns, but I also believed the co-researchers were capable of conducting this focus group on their own. When we had our next meeting, they shared with me their perspectives on how they were impacted by the focus groups with the home visitors. Joan replied:

It was neat to have a focus group with the staff and you weren't there; like you trusted us to do a good job. It was different because usually it's the staff or someone else questioning parents about the program and it was reversed here; we were now asking them.

Mary expressed concern that some of the home visitors would not come and sit at the table when asked to join the rest of the group:

But maybe they didn't feel comfortable with us asking them questions. Maybe they felt like they were being threatened. I don't know what they felt honestly. I guess if I would have to do it again I'd say, how did you feel when we did that focus group

While a few did come to the table after they were invited, Joan perceived they did so reluctantly. She shared she could tell who really wanted to be there by observing their body language:

I kind of knew who was going to participate and who wasn't, mainly by their body language. And the sad thing is it kind of hurt my feelings. Body language is hurtful sometimes.

The co-researchers believed as they looked at issues addressed by Early Head Start families more seriously, it was going to be a challenge to share the data. Mary commented:

We didn't expect some of the comments that we got from the families we interviewed. As we become more aware, how will we bring about changes? You can't go tell the home visitors they need to be more respectful to parents when they already think they are. It's going to be hard to come up with a way to do that different. That's going to be the challenge and how to do it in a way that we're not being disrespectful to them.

The discussion moved in the direction of how they felt their relationship with the home visitors had become strained in the last year. They expressed their frustration and anger as illustrated in the following excerpts. For example, as members of the Parent Committee, they dedicated many days to prepare a float for the parade. Joan shared:

When we worked on parade, we spent 3-4 long days on the theme. We took work home, worked and worked and worked on it. We got to the parade none of our stuff was there. The home visitors decided to do something else and switched everything on us.

Amy stated that the parade was supposed to be the Parent Committee's project. "The home visitors just decided to change it on us." Sara replied: "That's why I'm so burnt out about helping out again this year. They come up with the ideas and ask if its ok; then they don't listen to our ideas." Joan added:

They think they are better than other people. I get really mad; that's the way I am all the time anymore though. I let it build up and build up and build up and then finally its just like . . . oh dear . . .

I heard the profound sense of marginalization the Early Head Start mothers were experiencing in their relationship with some of the Early Head Start staff, and in some measure, a belief that they will remain subordinate and living on the margins, no matter what they do. This was in sharp contrast to their earlier conversations in which they had shared a sense of strong connections with their home visitors.

It became apparent through this dialogue that tensions had emerged between the co-researchers and home visitors, tensions that may be related to the PAR project. The co-researchers were very puzzled by this change, leading to feelings of hurt and frustration. But listening to their reflections on this focus group, I also sensed that the home visitors were experiencing some of the same frustrations, however without the space to discuss it openly. They were denied involvement in this PAR process from the beginning due to IRB's concerns regarding dual-role conflict. It now appeared that it may have had an inadvertent effect of creating a sense of exclusion that was threatening to them.

Tensions within the Agency

The PAR project began at a time when the agency was experiencing a significant organizational transition. I was a new executive director, following an Administrator who left behind a very disgruntled staff. I was trying to develop a new culture within the organization based on PAR principles as a way of life, and also trying to start my dissertation at same time. I was espousing openness yet, as a condition of doing my research in this agency, I was shutting important people out. I was dealing with organizational issues from the outset and a research focus that was ambiguous from the beginning. My expectation that staff would accept the conditions of the IRB and they would tolerate this approach was naive. Upon reflection of this event at a later time, this was a naïve assumption.

The work I was doing with co-researchers could not be shared with Early Head Start staff; they were out of the loop. The co-researchers and I had inside information that could not be shared with them for fear of violating IRB mandates. However, we were unable to have these relevant dialogues due to missing partners.

Our PAR team continued to meet weekly, scheduled individual interviews and focus groups. The transcriptions of these interviews were completed by my Administrative Assistant. Prior to her transcribing the tapes, I received permission from the Governing Board of Directors to use her as a resource. In early July 2005, the Early Head Start Program Coordinator approached me with concerns that she thought that it was conflict of interest for the Administrative Assistant to be typing my dissertation. I addressed her concerns by explaining

that she was not typing my dissertation, but transcribing the interviews that would eventually be shared with the Early Head Start program once my dissertation research was completed. I also told her that prior to giving her the tapes for transcription, I received permission from the Governing Board to allow this to happen. The Board felt strongly that this research would benefit the Agency as well and were supportive of the work I was doing. She stated that the Early Head Start Director had shared the same concerns; however, at that point I had not heard from her personally. I spoke to the Early Head Start Director the next day on the phone and shared my conversation from the previous day. When I asked her if she still had concerns she stated she was fine with the explanation. I believed that there did not need to be any further discussion of this concern. The PAR team continued scheduling meetings and interviews through July and August 2005.

Increased Scrutiny from the Institutional Review Board

On August 1, 2005, I received a letter from the IRB that provided the most challenging complication to date. The IRB had received a complaint about my research and I was mandated to stop all research immediately; they were going to conduct an audit of my research. I was to send them all the research data I had to date. They did not inform me of the nature of the charge. Needless to say, I went into shock and was overcome with a myriad of emotions. How did a benign project such as identifying indicators for a measurement tool become such a perilous project?

I complied with their requests which included sending them all my documentation, which involved 17 files. They responded September 8, 2005 with 14 questions as a result of their audit (see Appendix F). They stated that I needed to address a number of issues they believed warranted clarification before they decided what actions were appropriate to pursue. They also wanted to meet with my dissertation chair and me once they reviewed my responses to resolve any remaining questions. I was to call the IRB office to schedule a conference with the members of the IRB Audit Team. Following is a summary of the key points addressed in their questions.

Research Population

- While the protocol indicated that my intent was to include a minimum of 12-15 participants as the subjects from the research component, my study only involved four co-researchers. They asked for an explanation of the rationale for the change in number of participants.
- Recruitment.

The protocol indicated that recruitment of participants as co-researchers would be done by having the Early Head Start Policy Council send letters to various individuals including current and former Early Head Start parents, community, school stakeholders, and county level administrator(s). Once people chose to participate, the Policy Council would contact them for an orientation meeting. They asked for clarification on whether the recruitment of the four participant co-researchers was actually done by the Early Head Start Policy Council, or whether I used my personal contacts.

Further Recruitment Clarification

In reviewing Files 11-4, they read an invitation to Early Head Start parents from the Early Head Start Policy Council (dated February 21, 2005) to participate in the project in a variety of ways, including as “members of the co-research team.” A similar letter in the same file to the Venango County FOFCB members (dated April 14, 2005) extends the same invitation. They wanted clarification on how many copies of each of these letters were distributed, how many were returned, and whether any of them generated a volunteer to participate as a co-researcher. They also wanted to know how many indicated a willingness to “participate in a focus group, fill out a survey, (or) share information through individual interviews?”

Changes Generated

They wanted clarification regarding any alterations in Early Head Start programs, services, protocols, or administrative procedures consequence of information generated by the action research process or as a consequence of my dissertation research.

Preliminary Data

They questioned whether any of the preliminary results or data collected in the work with the research team had been shared with Early Head Start administrators or staff. The specifically wanted to know if any members of the Early Head Start staff or administration were privy to the information included in any of the tapes or transcripts.

Transcript Preparation

They wanted clarification on who prepared the typed transcripts from interviews, meetings, and focus groups, and if the typist was a member of the co-research team. They wanted a description of the location and conditions of the place in which the data, tapes, computer files and transcripts were stored.

Data Access

They questioned how access to the data by the co-research team was managed, and if other members of the team had notes, files, or tapes that were not reflected in the data that was sent to them

I was directed to send the responses in writing by October 14, 2005. Following is a summary of my responses to the key points I submitted to the IRB Chair on October 6, 2005 (see Appendix G).

Practitioner/Researcher Response to Institutional Review Board

Research Population

In a letter dated 10/06/05 (see Appendix G), I explained that my initial intentions were to recruit a minimum of 12-15 participants as the subjects for the research component. However, once the recruitment began for the research population, only four participants came forward who were willing to invest the time and energy needed to be involved in the intense demands of this project. While there were 15 parents who expressed an interest in wanting more information regarding the project, once they were given a clear, detailed overview

of what was involved, they could not commit to being part of the co-research team. However, they were willing to be involved in others ways with the project, such as focus groups and individual interviews.

Further Recruitment Clarification

I stated that the Policy Council members opted to be co-researchers. Therefore the recruitment was actually done by the Early Head Start Policy Council. They sent 90 letters to all enrolled Early Head Start parents to participate in the project in a variety of ways. Fifty-two responded; no responses generated a volunteer to participate as a co-researcher. Six responses indicated a willingness to participate in a focus group, 31 in a survey, and 20 indicated a willingness to share information through an individual interview. Some responses had multiple areas checked.

They also sent 45 letters to active members of FOOFB to participate in the project in a variety of ways. Nine responded; no responses generated a volunteer to participate as a co-researcher. One response indicated a willingness to participate in a focus group, seven in a survey, and one indicated a willingness to share information through an individual interview.

Changes Generated

I stated that no Early Head Start programs, services, protocols, or administrative procedures at Community Services of Venango County had been altered as a consequence of information generated by the PAR process as a consequence of my dissertation research. However, changes were made at

FOOFCB as a result of FOOFCB members participating in a focus group. They Included:

- Changing the name of the Early Head Start task force to Early Head Start Governing Board and moving the Early Head Start report to monthly and further up on the agenda.
- Re-convening the Early Head Start Governing Board with new members as a sub-committee of the FOOFCB.

These are significant because co-researchers facilitated the focus group and shared their concerns that the FOOFCB was not fulfilling their responsibilities to the Early Head Start program.

Preliminary Data

I stated that in the course of some individual interviews, I received information that some Early Head Start staff told families that they could not schedule appointments after 3:30 p.m. I shared this information with the Early Head Start Program Director and the Early Head Start Program Coordinator. No staff were identified through this information. I did not share this information with the staff. Early Head Start staff and administration were not privy to the information included in any of the tapes or transcripts. Also, preliminary data indicated that families did not think playgroups are working well. I shared this information with the Early Head Start Program Director and Early Head Start Program Coordinator in order to confirm information they already had. Attendance at playgroups had been significantly low and was already on the list

as a priority to look at ways to improve. As of this date, September 2005, no changes have been made to the playgroups.

Transcript Preparation

I explained that the typed transcripts from interviews, meetings, and focus groups were prepared by the secretary for Community Services of Venango County and that she was not a member of the co-researcher team. I replied that the location of the place in which the data, tapes, computer files, and transcripts were stored and secured was at my home office at 193 South Main Street, Seneca, Pennsylvania. My office is located in a separate building on my property. While my husband has a key to my office, I had the only key to the file cabinet the data are kept in. I also was the only one with access to the password on my computer.

The only files not in my possession were the two staff focus group transcripts/tapes. They were in a locked file cabinet in the secretary's office locked on the third floor of the Transit Building, 206 Seneca Street, Oil City, Pennsylvania. The secretary locks her door at the end of the day. The Facility Coordinator has a key to her office; however, she has the only key to the file cabinet that these two files are in. I did not know the location of that key. She assured me that she is the only one who knows where the key is located.

Data Access

I stated that the co-research team did not have access to the data up to this point. They knew that I secured the data and that they would review it after

data collection was completed. Any notes the co-researchers took, during individual interviews of focus groups were shared with me and are in my possession for safekeeping. They had no other individual/group notes, files, or tapes that were reflected in the data sent to the IRB. Each co-researcher had a binder containing training information that they have gathered since the project began.

I did not know where the complaint about the project had come from, and was never informed about the precipitating event or concern. When I read their concerns, I then believed it came from within my agency, and from my point of view, came as a result of agency stakeholders being denied access to this project. The issue of who was typing the interviews was not laid to rest as I had assumed. Of the 14 questions, several were related to this topic. However, my dissertation chair, a member of the IRB board, was asked to recuse herself from any discussion around this issue.

I scheduled a meeting for November 4, 2005 to meet with the IRB Audit team to answer any questions they had as a result of my reply. My dissertation chair accompanied me to this meeting. It lasted for about two hours; I was asked many questions by the IRB members present. I gave honest answers and addressed them as clearly as I could. I was told they would send a letter to me within two weeks regarding the next steps needed to resolve these issues.

I received a letter on November 11, 2005 from the Chair of the IRB Audit Team. It stated:

We have some specific measures that we are directing you to follow to rectify some of the problems that were uncovered in the course of the audit, and others you will have to address in your proposal for renewal of the research. In most cases renewal of a previously approved protocol is a relatively *pro forma* process, but in this instance we believe that a full re-submission of the protocol is warranted, with special attention paid to addressing the ongoing concerns raised by the IRB. We must state that we believe the problems that have arisen in the course of this project are a consequence of the lack of a strong and clear distinction between your roles as researcher for the dissertation, Executive Director of the agency, and director of an action research process—while these roles may be clear to you, they may not consistently be so in the minds of the individuals with whom you are interacting in the process. . . . Our specific requirements are as follows:

1. As your permission to conduct research expired at the end of July 2005, you would be required to request a renewal of the IRB approval before resuming research as a matter of routine procedure. Given the issues that have arisen, we are asking that you use this renewal process as an opportunity to resolve remaining dilemmas. In the revision of the IRB protocol that you will have to submit for full board review, please be prepared to address the following issues:
 - Discuss how the confidentiality of participants is maintained in terms of the exposure they may receive as the typist transcribes

tapes. Although there were several opinions offered at our meeting, we remain concerned about whether the typist will be able to identify individuals who are being discussed and as she may be a co-worker of some individuals, how this may affect long-term staff relations. Please discuss your plans to transcribe future tape recordings.

- Please discuss how information that has been obtained through the dissertation research or through the action research has resulted in changes in EHS policy, procedures or operations. As you noted in our discussions, your awareness of curtailed working hours by some staff resulted in corrective measures, which you undertook as Executive Director. You indicated that the membership and composition of the FOFCB governing board changed. You also indicated that data about playgroups was shared with the EHS program director and program coordinator. Please indicate instances in which this conflict of roles has taken place, and what measures you plan to take if such issues arise again. We believe that in instances of future choice points where there is a conflict between your roles as researcher and Executive Director it would be appropriate to recuse yourself from decision making, or consult with your dissertation advisor or the IRB.

- Clarify how the recruitment of participants in the research project actually transpired. As was clear from our discussions, your four research participants were *not recruited according to the approved procedures*, and none of the approved procedures yielded any volunteers for participation. We believe this lacks poor judgment in the research design, and perhaps naïve assumptions about mitigating the dilemmas created by the dual roles. Please offer a frank discussion of how recruitment was carried out, and where there were problems with the process.
- Discuss how you plan to share data with members of the co-research team, and what your plans for co-authorship with the co-researchers.

Their responses added many more steps I needed to do in order to begin my research again. I scheduled a meeting in December 2005 with my dissertation committee to review the IRB Audit Team's response.

Direction of Dissertation

After reviewing the IRB concerns, my dissertation committee decided I had enough data to write my dissertation and, therefore, I did not need to return to the IRB for a full board review. We then discussed how to focus my dissertation in light of these changes and outcomes. One option was for me to draft my findings with quite a limited focus, examining only the experiences of the participating Early Head Start mothers. However, another option was to tell the larger story here, including the concerns held by the IRB regarding protecting

human subjects, the decisions made in light of their guiding principles in place, and the tensions and outcomes that followed.

The purpose of the latter was not to blame, but rather to provide a balanced examination of the complexities and perspectives inherent in practitioner-led, community based PAR research affiliated with a university. Such practice is a new research genre, with vastly different social relations. It is also a strongly emerging field; the past 10 years have seen a significant expansion of such research practices, particularly within the public health arena (Boser, 2006).

My dissertation chair requested a meeting between the IRB, my dissertation committee, and me to discuss the option of examining the larger story of this project. We proposed some possibilities, which included considering ways to incorporate the IRB's perspective into this document, perhaps through interviews, or through affording them the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the findings chapter, among other options. My preference, along with my committee's support, was to approach this collaboratively, seek to learn from the experience, and incorporate these findings into the study to better inform future work. Following this direction would mean revising my protocol and going back for another full board review, a process that could delay my dissertation another several months. However, I was willing to pursue this course of action if it could remove barriers for others in university settings who want to address important issues through a PAR dissertation, but are dissuaded due to the challenges currently in place.

My dissertation chair sent a letter in February 2006, outlining all that had transpired and inviting the audit committee to meet with us to explore these issues collectively. The goal was to come together around a common understanding of PAR and to discuss frankly the difficulties of matching the IRB process to the character of PAR. The hope was that jointly we could develop strategies for addressing our common goal of protecting the welfare, rights, and dignity of those individuals participating in institutionally-sanctioned research. By early April 2006 there was no response.

My dissertation chair spoke to the IRB Chair asking for an update; she stated that they declined the invitation for various reasons and would respond by letter soon. We never received a letter. However, the IRB chair stated that they did want me to finish my dissertation and hoped my discussion of their role in this process would be a balanced perspective. It was within this context that I began to write my dissertation, nine months after receiving the letter from the IRB to stop my research.

Dilemma with Co-Researchers

Prior to starting to write my dissertation, I needed to share what happened with my co-researchers. We were very involved in the PAR process together and were progressing quite nicely when things came to an abrupt halt. As I had no idea initially what happened, I felt the need to protect them from any harm that could evolve here. I was concerned with the ethical implications of sharing these events with the co-researchers under these circumstances. I believed it was wiser for me to protect their well being and take whatever heat was about to

come. But on the other side of the coin, this is precisely the circumstances under which action research has the best opportunity of addressing serious issues of voice and power, and so conducting this research under such circumstances is even more important. I needed to find a way to balance the urge to protect with a commitment to empower.

The efforts to minimize the likelihood of harm to human subjects by severely limiting the kinds of research that can be done, the questions that can be asked, and the types of individuals involved in the research has the effect of making social research impotent in terms of addressing issues of real importance (Greenwood & Brydon-Miller, 2006). This experience brings to light the obligation of the researcher to tell the truth even if it may be difficult. It was not just my research; they were involved from the very beginning. Early Head Start co-researchers willingly put themselves at risks with their involvement; their contributions were created from their deep involvement in the local context. They needed to have the choice to accept the pain involved as a price for having their voices heard. There are limits to protection and there are risks of participating in PAR, and the likelihood of achieving significant social change is quite small.

I initially told the co-researchers that the IRB was reviewing our PAR project because it was a new research approach for them and that this review was a time consuming and cumbersome process. I contacted them monthly to give an update of their progress; I could tell they were confused and upset that what we had been doing was stopped. Finally after all the IRB discussions and

meetings with my dissertation committee, I decided to tell them what had happened from my perspective.

I scheduled a meeting and explained that the IRB had received a complaint regarding our research; that was the reason it had been stopped. I shared the 14 questions they asked and my responses. I told them I did not continue the PAR project itself when the IRB stopped the research process in August 2005 because at that time I had no idea what happened. I thought there was a possibility that someone may have filed a complaint against the co-researchers. In order to protect them, I stopped the project as well.

The co-researchers realized many benefits from the PAR project in the time they were involved. These included developing capacities to sharpen their ability to think and act critically, engaging local partners, openness to look at things differently, and enhanced knowledge in several different areas. However, there were potential benefits for them that were not realized as a result of the IRB's limits on this project. For example, the co-researchers planned to be involved in the analysis of the data we collected. But the continuation of this PAR dissertation was blocked by the IRB and they were unable to fully experience a PAR study from start to finish. At this point, I felt powerless to stop or alter this process. It took five months to get my dissertation proposal approved. The IRB review of my data took nine months. If I returned for another full board review it would be another time-consuming task that had no guarantee of success. It was time for me to reflect on these experiences to gain an

understanding of power relations that evolved during the course of this dissertation and begin writing this dissertation.

Summary

Carrying out this PAR dissertation in a university setting brought about unanticipated complexities. The constraints placed on the design by the IRB due to the construct of power inherent in the dual relationship in this particular situation could not be ignored, and led to greater issues that also needed to be addressed in this dissertation. The construct of power inherent in the dual relationship is too simplistic for assessing risk in community based PAR. This is a bigger issue in that all relationships have power, and it is a question of balancing risk vs. benefit in any given context.

This descriptive phase of the PAR project built a foundation for the analysis. Here links were found between the key events and the principles of PAR where meanings were extracted, attaching significance to what was found. Chapter Six addresses the findings of this study in detail.

CHAPTER SIX

FINDINGS

Introduction

The initial questions of this dissertation explored were whether and in what ways the principles of PAR contributed to impacting the strength of local voice in relevant dialogue and how those who participated in the PAR project perceived their voice made a contribution. For purposes of this study, local voice was comprised of three constituent groups: Early Head Start mothers; Early Head Start staff; and, practitioner/researcher. Also, a third objective was added to this study, namely to examine the interconnections and tensions that emerged between PAR and the IRB as I experienced them through this dissertation.

In this chapter, I organize the findings of the study through participant observations and conversations with the co-researchers. Whenever possible, I use quotes from the co-researchers to support their voice. I also discovered as part of my reflections, that power and voice were repeatedly interwoven among the constituent groups.

I present the findings of the study in two sections. The first section presents local constituents' perspectives of their voice in Early Head Start prior to the initiation of the PAR project. The second section presents their experiences of the PAR project, reflections on voice, any changes perceived and perspectives on what aspects of the PAR project contributed to their experiences.

Local Constituents' Perspectives on Their
Voice in Early Head Start
Prior to Initiation of the Participatory Action
Research Project

As stated above, the data identifies three local constituents' perspectives present that impacted the research prior to the initiation of the PAR project. These include the Early Head Start mothers, the Early Head Start staff, and myself, the practitioner/researcher. Each constituent group demonstrated distinct and different perspectives that impacted this study. In the following section, I provide several illustrations of these perspectives prior to the initiation of the PAR project.

Early Head Start Mothers

View of Themselves in the World

The data reflects the Early Head Start mothers' perspectives on certain aspects of their world with them in it. These data offer some insights into how the identities of these young mothers are constructed in relation to the broader economy and culture. Their conversations not only disclosed complex ways in which they identified themselves, but also how they perceived how they are viewed by the larger society. For instance, while they brought divergent experiences regarding the poverty that shaped their everyday lives, they all identified a sense of something wrong in the world as they were growing up. In this context, they revealed the stigma of living in poverty and a sense of resignation of their status associated with it. A sense of powerlessness is

illustrated in the following excerpt as Mary offered her perspective, “Growing up there was always a sense of . . . people don’t care about us, they were going to do whatever they want.”

Others shared their profound sense of marginalization, and in some measure, a belief that they will remain insubordinate, and living on the margins, no matter what they do. For example, Joan states: “Sometimes, I don’t even feel like trying . . . I’m not a stupid person, I’m not scum or anything but sometimes I feel like I’m not good enough” Amy also described her experiences with marginality and not being as worthy as those with more means. She shared her experiences of poor treatment in healthcare:

If you are on welfare, the doctor sees you at the clinic instead of treating you at their office. I was seen in an office once and I can see a difference in care. When I was a teenager I had a bad experience at the clinic here with the way I was treated.

Mary corroborated, sharing her experience with the lack of access to some services and extends the conversation to include how this impacts their responsibilities as parents:

Early Head Start home visitors talk about the importance of getting your child to see a dentist before they are three. You can’t find one around here that will take the Access card. We have to go to Butler or Pittsburgh, and transportation is a real problem here.

Joan’s response also affirms this dilemma:

I've had quite a few people tell me that as soon as your kid starts getting teeth, you're supposed to take them to the dentist. And you're right Mary; you can't find one around here that will take an MA card.

Their experiences also illuminated how lack of financial resources limited access to opportunities. Unevenly distributed resources were discussed and the importance of supports available to them as they continued to be caught in the struggles of living in poverty. For example, Amy reports:

Times are tough for a lot of us in this county. I read in the newspaper that the average income in our county is \$30,000. We don't even make \$12,000; right now. My boyfriend makes a little more than \$10,000, maybe. We get food stamps and anything that supplements our income.

We can't live on this without other support.

Sara commented on her appreciation of the resources, such as Wal-Mart cards, meals, childcare, and transportation provided to them while participating in this project. Amy added: "I can get diapers on my way home. I really need them."

The Early Head start mothers described other stigmas they faced at different points in their lives. For example, Amy shared her awareness that people believe the poverty she lives in is a result of her personal failure:

People look at you and say . . . oh, she had kids young, or she's lazy or she made bad choices; that's why she is poor. The images that are made about people who might not be as educated, who might not have made it, or who don't have family around, or have done this, that and the other, hurts.

Others also spoke of their own personal difficulties of being portrayed in a negative light and the barriers present due to prevailing middle class values and attitudes. Often they get called “welfare mothers” or “recipients.” Sara further elaborates: “people think of us as girls who get pregnant easy. And who don’t care or anything; we’re just losers, so they say.”

Poverty was experienced as extremely personal and as part of their everyday existence. As a result, they encountered pervasive scrutiny in many areas of their lives. For example, visits to the welfare office required giving up personal privacy in order to get resources to keep their family together. Sara recalled, “I hate going to the welfare office. We’re treated like second class citizens. I just feel a little low on the totem pole.” Mary added that there are even times at the grocery store when she feels judged:

I see people staring at me when I’m standing in line with my kids to buy groceries. People judge you without even knowing how you feel as an individual. I feel like I have no rights.

The negative impact of these interactions contributed to a sense of powerlessness in trying to change these images. Joan verbalized her frustration of not being able to get people to see their individual potentials:

These stereotypes--they leave out who we really are. There’s a lot more to us than just those statements. I mean, they leave out things that make us lead up to those stereotypes, like abuse in our families or lack of support. That sometimes we have to leave school to support our families and stuff like that. People don’t understand we have problems at home

and sometimes get kicked out. They just think we're lazy and on welfare and uneducated.

Mary emphasized the challenges associated with changing perceptions of others and getting them to understand the extreme demands upon them by their economic conditions:

A lot of people don't see it; they have all those things. They don't see it because they're all up there. But we see it. It's really just the opposite.

They don't see us relying on an old car to keep a job, struggling to handle basic expenses or juggling bills to pay the rent.

The Early Head Start mothers described the conditions they experienced living in poverty. They were aware of the societal attitudes that resulted in limited choices, indifference, exclusion, and stigma.

View of Themselves in the Early Head Start Program

Many other obstacles encountered reinforced their perceptions of themselves. Further stories illuminated subtle social differences they experienced in the very program that was built on a foundation of empowering families. While the Early Head Start mothers believed there were many good aspects of their program, further conversations led to the disclosure that there were times when they felt they did not belong in the presence of Early Head Start staff. The tensions were articulated by the young mothers as they disclosed specific situations when they felt they were not taken seriously when sitting at the table with them during Parent Committee meetings. Amy shared that there were times she felt excluded and wondered why she was there. She stated:

We were trying to talk, but they weren't really listening to what we were trying to say to them. It seemed like they weren't paying attention. At times it seems like no one cares. It seems to make no sense in me being here if people aren't going to at least acknowledge what I have to say. Joan agreed, adding: "I feel like I don't have a voice. Staff are high up; everyone is well educated. We're not; we're just the little people."

The stories they shared not only disclose complex ways in which they identified themselves but also their perspectives of how they experienced ongoing marginality by the larger society.

First Attempt to Engage Focus On Our Future Collaborative Board

As discussed previously in Chapter Four, the Focus on Our Future Collaborative Board played a significant role in securing the initial Early Head Start grant, and because of their strong investment in Early Head Start activities, concerns and accomplishments, Venango County government designated it as the governing body for Early Head Start. Since its inception, this board's mission encouraged joint collaboration and continuously invited many other community members to join with their ongoing efforts to work together to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families in Venango County. Therefore, it seemed to be a legitimate place for the Early Head Start mothers to successfully extend an invitation to participate with the PAR project. When their initial recruitment efforts with this board yielded no new participants, we were perplexed by their lack of response. While they applauded our efforts, their rejection of the invitation to join

the PAR process was inconsistent and contradictory to their professed desire to strengthen participation.

One of the major differences in our recruiting efforts was that the Early Head Start mothers were the ones extending the invitation to Collaborative Board members to participate with us in varying degrees within the PAR project. The involvement of parents in this capacity was unusual for this board. The co-researchers were making their own history by approaching the board in a different manner, in the face of established ways of doing business. They made an effort to gain respect for their knowledge contribution to concerns of major importance to them, as well as attempt to level the relationship between the board and themselves in a way that would enhance the ongoing collaborative efforts.

The Collaborative Board has historically taken the lead in finding ways to bring families together to work toward collaborative goals, not vice-versa. They were willing to take information from the co-researchers but not willing to commit to engaging in a more open, mutually inclusive relationship. They restricted themselves to comfortable areas and safe distances, avoiding real encounters with those they sought to empower. They remained unaware of how they contributed to marginalization of the co-researchers and that their decision to not get involved contributed to more experiences of inequalities and injustice.

*Early Head Start Staff: Engaged with
Practitioner/Researcher and Co-Researchers*

Because the Early Head Start staff were excluded from the research process itself, data that reflects their experience is limited. However some insights are inferred through observations and reflections of others. For example, many of the Early Head Start staff worked with me during my field project and also invested time and energy into developing constructs for the measurement tool. They challenged me to explain the importance of some of the data requested and strongly opposed data they perceived not relevant to the success of the program. We attended meetings together for eight months and ended with a retreat that involved other key stakeholders in order to continue dialogue on creating a measurement tool that would capture information that was significant to those involved. They left the meeting with the assumption that they would continue with this project once I began my dissertation.

The Early Head Start mothers also offered observations and reflections regarding the high level of involvement of the home visitors and the importance they played in their own growth. This is illustrated as Sara described her connection with her home visitor:

My home visitor really encouraged me to get involved and meet other parents. She was always suggesting many different activities available. After awhile, I decided to give it a try. I've had the chance to be an officer on the Policy Council, a member of the Parent Committee, and now as a co-researcher.

Joan shared that she was reluctant at first to take on too much responsibility when she started in Early Head Start. However, as she gained more confidence and skills with the help of her home visitor, she took more risks and got involved. All of the co-researchers expressed the importance of their relationships with their home visitors. Amy summed it up best:

She is always available to help, keep me going. She listens to my ideas and takes me seriously. She always follows up with things I ask about. She's responsible for teaching me about child development. I've learned so much; I sing, read and talk to my kids so much more. If it wasn't for my relationship with her, I wouldn't know what to do.

These conversations indicate that the Early Head Start staff were engaged with the families they worked with and offered them a supportive network.

*Practitioner/Researcher: Initial Vision for the
Participatory Action Research Project*

As I moved through my doctoral studies, reading the literature on PAR resonated with my worldview. My passion to make a difference comes from a place where people's voices have value and should be heard. My role as a researcher was to ensure that they spoke and were noticed.

My commitment to PAR is a result of working in and with community organizations, where I experienced the struggles and frustrations of limited resources to meet the ever increasing demands of those in need. From my experiences working in human services, I saw the importance of emphasizing authentic participation from those experiencing real life issues in order to develop

worthy actions. Their local knowledge has the ability to increase our understanding of the complex interactions among economic and social factors that contribute to disparities and, therefore could inform the design of interventions aimed at reducing these disparities.

I planned to apply the principles of PAR throughout the research process. I envisioned my research to include Early Head Start parents, Early Head Start staff, and community members working with me in a collaborative process, sharing power to uncover and advance knowledge in order to develop a long-term measurement tool for Early Head Start in our county. I wanted this collective dynamic process to encourage a high degree of meaningful participation where members become co-researchers, prioritizing the needs that are meaningful to their community. I imagined that my role as a facilitator in the process would challenge them to learn new skills and develop their capacities for learning through critical reflection on actions taken.

In addition to fostering learning and creating change, I saw the PAR project as having the ability to empower the co-researchers through building relationships and supportive structures. I hoped to provide opportunities for them to engage in action and reflect upon these experiences. I wanted them to be involved in all stages of the research process including identifying the problems to be explored, carrying out the research, and interpreting and acting upon the results. It was my intent to illustrate through this dissertation that working in this manner would enable the co-researchers to discover their voice, as well as identify what was most meaningful to them in the Early Head Start program.

Also, as a lack of understanding between universities and PAR persists, I hoped there would be opportunities for dialogue to discuss ways that could contribute to an appreciation of the different perspectives. Avenues could be available to discuss difficult challenges to partnerships that may arise from unequal power differentials. We would expand our knowledge about the dimensions of power in relationships and the ethical challenges faced in finding space within the university to engage in PAR. I envisioned ameliorating some of these difficulties and creating legitimation for PAR. Mutual trust and understanding would evolve through listening and sharing each other's contexts and values. We would acknowledge differences and diversity, and the need to re-conceptualize collective solutions, agendas, and alliances. And finally, I hoped we could find ways to engage the principles of PAR to facilitate social justice research rather than limit it.

Summary

In this section, local constituents provided different perspectives on voice prior to the initiation of the PAR project. We all had connections with Early Head Start where the project would be located. The Early Head Start mothers struggled with the marginalization they experienced as a result of growing up in poverty. However, they experienced positive relationships with Early Head Start staff at this point. The Early Head Start staff were invested in their program and were willing to get involved in the PAR project to further our previous work together. From my perspective, I believed we could form successful partnerships that would result in significant changes to their program and themselves. I

envisioned all involved, including the university, could provide the PAR project with a variety of resources that would be beneficial for the development of the PAR project.

Local Constituents' Experience of the Participatory Action Research Project and Perspectives

Introduction

One of the research questions is to what extent and in what ways the principles of PAR contributed to impacting the strength of local voice in relevant dialogue during the development of this project. In this section, I recount the experiences of the co-researchers and then provide their reflections on voice in the project, any changes they perceived, and their perspectives on what aspects of the project contributed to their experiences. Illustrations from the project are used to provide some insight into the process of translating principles of PAR into practice.

Co-Researchers Experiences

During the eight months of the PAR project, the co-researchers experienced several key events that impacted the PAR project. All of these were described in Chapter Five. Figure 1 is a diagram summarizing these key events. Following that are findings from their experiences during the PAR project.

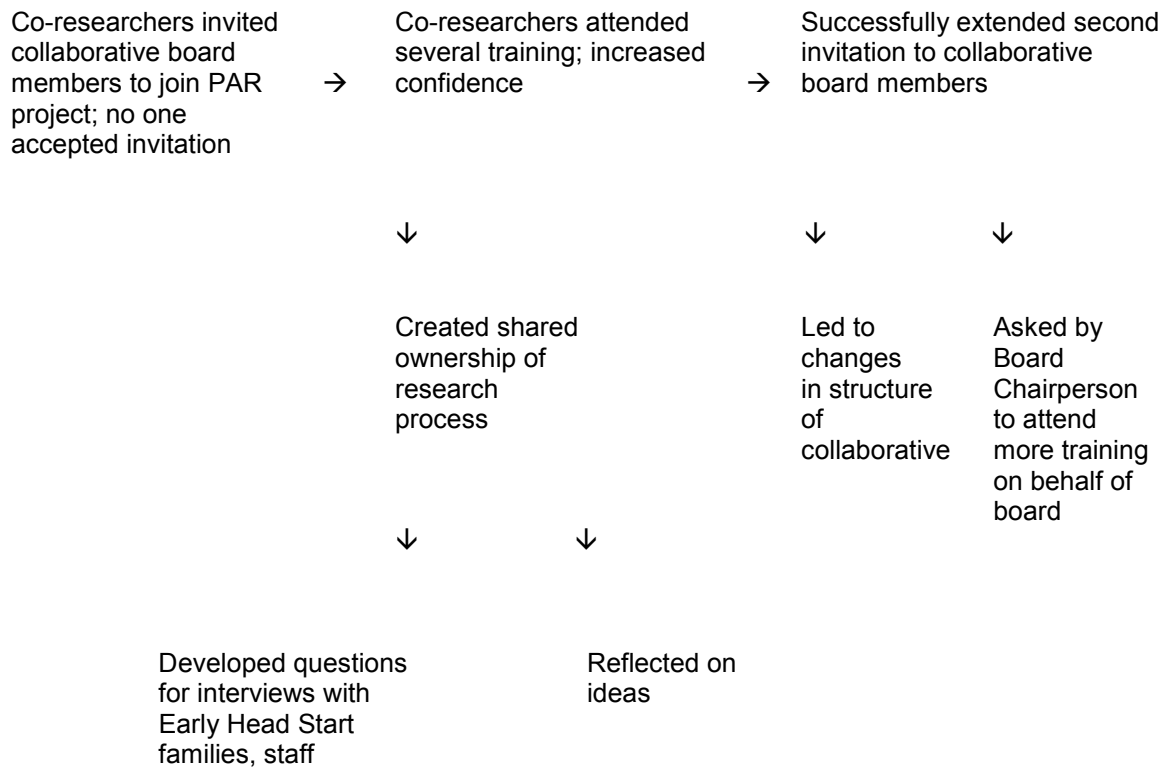


Figure 1. Key events for co-researchers.

New Knowledge Opportunities

One of the challenges in initiating the PAR project involved the recognition of the amount of content knowledge needed. Our early meetings together made us aware of the gaps in the knowledge base needed to move this project forward. Together, the co-researchers determined that more information would be required if this was to be a viable PAR project. They willingly brought priorities to the forefront and defined the problems and topics to be addressed. For instance, as we started to identify our first major tasks, the co-researchers expressed their concerns in regards to adequately performing them. They communicated the need to be prepared before they became involved with the community and conveyed that they needed to gain more knowledge in several areas of the PAR project. They were concerned about "not knowing enough." As Amy stated, "I want to be ready and confident with what I've learned."

The co-researchers were challenged by this new experience and expressed their difficulties in making sense of all that it encompassed. As Sara shared, "I have no idea what the heck I've gotten myself into! Everything seems so high up; you go right over my head." Joan also expressed confusion and frustration, but stated that her mother encouraged her to stick with it because she believed she would eventually get it. Joan further reflected, "We can't go and speak to groups of people if we're not prepared." From the beginning, the co-researchers saw information as valuable. Mary added, "I know I have a lot to learn, but we won't get better unless we know." The co-researchers recognized

what they needed to gain the skills and confidence to take an active role in the PAR project.

As a result of these conversations, it was essential for me to listen closely to the co-researchers concerns and validate their input. I was aware of their ambivalence and the necessity to increase conceptual clarity around the PAR process. Therefore, I needed to facilitate the initial learning process up front with a slower and deliberate pace, starting with small concepts and expanding to larger ones outside our group meetings as experience was gained. If they did not understand the circumstances in which they were working, they would not be in the position to become fully active participants in the PAR project.

It was evident that a training agenda needed to be designed in cooperation with the co-researchers to ensure relevance to their information requests. My own particular knowledge and expertise were put to service for the co-researchers. For instance, I was able to assist the co-researchers in accessing the training and resources that they identified as needed to develop a knowledge base to guide this project. In Chapter Four, I presented a description of trainings available to us. To summarize briefly, the Focus On Our Future Collaborative Board was committed to the development of a process that would foster the creation of an evaluation culture among community service providers. The Mental Health/Mental Retardation Administrator requested provider agencies to participate in a variety of trainings and seminars to increase capacities to implement program evaluations. These included workshops and seminars with

Dr. Michael Patton, Dr. Ted Poister, and the University of Pittsburgh Child Development Division of Applied Research and Evaluation.

Therefore, in order for the co-researchers to enhance their competencies, they took advantage of these trainings, along with additional ones discovered along the way. It was evident that they were invested in gaining new knowledge as they arrived early for the trainings and were prepared to get to work. These occasions educated them about a variety of evaluation concepts. They valued these learning events as evidenced by Sara's remark: "The knowledge that we've gained is valuable knowledge--I'm making a contribution and it's not just fluff; it's important information."

These opportunities educated the co-researchers about evaluation efforts nationally as well as in the local non-profit agencies. This assisted us in developing a knowledge base about the different components of developing an evaluation tool. As Mary stated:

It's taken me some time to realize what we are really doing. But we went to trainings to have a better understanding of what's important in evaluation. These helped me be better prepared.

Joan added: I think what we are doing is very time consuming but the information we've gained is worth it."

The learning opportunities provided the additional knowledge and skills necessary for this research. They learned, for example, how to carry out our work such as constructing logic models, identifying performance indicators, designing interview questions, facilitating focus groups and conducting

interviews. Their participation in the trainings, along with our weekly meetings learning about the concepts of PAR, enhanced their confidence in accomplishing our goals as well as shaped their sense of identity and agency. Mary acknowledged: “these trainings really explained a lot. I have a better understanding of logic models and focus groups. I’m beginning to feel prepared for the next step.” They began to see themselves as knowledgeable co-researchers as Joan added:

I’m feeling more comfortable; this participatory action research is starting to make some sense and has me thinking about other ideas for our project. These are the only meetings that I don’t mind coming to.

Participation in the trainings also contributed to their sense of commitment and willingness to invest themselves energetically in the activities. Their newly acquired confidence created a shared sense of ownership and generated a common cause to the project. For example, not only were the co-researchers attending trainings, they also continued our weekly two hour meetings. If one of the Early Head Start mothers had difficulty with transportation, one of the other mothers picked her up. If one co-researcher was late for the meeting, they would call to see if everything was alright. They were investing a significant amount of time and energy in a project they considered a worthwhile endeavor as evidenced through Joan’s comment: “My husband had to work tonight and won’t get home until 8:00 p.m. He said I should just skip today’s meeting, and I said, no, I’m going to the research meeting.”

PAR is emancipatory in that it not only leads to practical knowledge but to new abilities to create knowledge and develop new patterns of thinking regarding the problems at hand. It was apparent that the knowledge gained supported the enhancement of the co-researchers. Joan commented: “it’s added a depth of understanding that we’ve not had before in Early Head Start.” It increased their capacity to act with determination, confidence, and resourcefulness.

While the training opportunities fulfilled the more obvious outcome of acquiring a shared knowledge base, the more subtle aspects of beginning a meaningful dialogue and developing a constructive partnership were initiated. The new knowledge gained was important but it was also important to develop processes for effective stakeholder inclusion and voice, for meaningful interaction and dialogue. In the following section, I discuss how significant participation by the co-researchers created spaces for dialogue, contributed to building and enhancing relationships, changed roles, and supported their re-engagement with Collaborative Board members.

Meaningful Participatory Processes

In order to develop a genuinely collaborative approach, I sought to create a safe space where we could share thoughts, develop ideas, and continue to nurture relationships. Thus, I attended to creating conditions that engendered trust and worked to develop a research process that minimized a hierarchical relationship between the co-researchers and me.

Participatory structures were important for strengthening collaboration of the co-researchers in all stages of the study. The PAR project fostered a sense

of inclusion in decision-making as the co-researchers defined issues, goals, agendas, and implemented activities. It appeared to be a key to promoting sustainability of the PAR project during our eight months together. It also enabled them to engage with the research processes from an empowered position. For instance, the co-researchers mutually coordinated our time as well as made decisions on how to design our work as we moved forward. They equally divided the tasks, spent a considerable amount of time on framing questions for the interviews and focus groups, and discussed how these would be facilitated. At the end of each meeting, we discussed our progress, reviewed what we covered, and presented different ideas for the next meeting. At one point Joan stated: “There was never one designated person in charge all the time. We took turns leading the meetings, getting the group talking, and going from there.”

This context allowed the co-researchers to increase their capacity to affect the research process and assisted them in developing shared ownership of the PAR project. They functioned continuously to strengthen and support their own ways of thinking, acting, and built confidence in their decision-making abilities. This process was carried out weekly and openly with all co-researchers participating. This is consistent with PAR principles in that it encouraged joint participation and collaboration within a mutually acceptable framework to understand and/or solve problems.

Changing Roles Between Co-Researchers and Researcher

Central to efforts to democratize research is changing roles of the co-researchers and the researcher. Democracy in inquiry cannot be promoted unless the co-researchers are enabled to take charge of the meaning construction process. As they developed their capacity to participate effectively in shaping our agenda, they learned other strategies of how to negotiate and collaborate with each other. I felt my role shifting as they took the lead in the planning process. It moved more toward supporting particular efforts and to encouraging collective reflection on the ongoing activity. Specifically, this was evidenced as they began preparing for their presentation to the Collaborative Board. For example, I was asked to get our presentation on the Collaborative Board's agenda as I had the resources to make this happen. I was also assigned to wrap up the presentation as well as give an overview of PAR and my dissertation.

The PAR project fulfilled some of its democratic obligations when the main thrust of the process was toward increasing the co-researchers control over knowledge production and action. Their changing roles also fostered a belief that they can be agents of change. Mary's remarks emphasized this point:

Our direct contact with the families was a real eye opener for me . . . the hands on experience was more than I expected . . . we were there and heard them tell us what wasn't working and we brought the information back to try to change things.

Their contributions demonstrated that they had significant involvement and control over the research activities.

Re-Engagement with Collaborative Board Members

The co-researchers planned opportunities to engage other stakeholders in activities related to our PAR project. Gradually, they wanted to reach out from their group to engage the potential of different perspectives that might contribute to new insights and ideas about how things could be different for the Early Head Start program. As discussed in Chapter Five, the first attempt to engage other stakeholders was not successful.

The initial rejection to expand our network made us acutely aware of the challenges ahead in convincing the Collaborative Board members of the need for greater involvement with the PAR project and the importance of developing approaches together. The feeling of lack of engagement concerned us for awhile and was difficult to address. It raised many questions about why Collaborative Board members were not interested in the PAR project which included the possibility that the amount of time and commitment required of others was too much.

It also raised doubts about our ability to carry out this project. Initially, the co-researchers saw what happened to them in terms of their own inadequacies and wondered if they had sufficient skills to continue. They did not hide their emotions and revealed significant disappointment about the Collaborative Board members' failure to live up to their values. Amy questioned her value as well:

We worked so hard on our presentation . . . for what? I mean we're trying to learn new things to help our kids; aren't we good enough for them? I don't know what to say. I feel insignificant.

However, they eventually reframed this as an occasion to generate new, more effective processes to engage others. They redefined it as an issue that was not going to be resolved right away; that their uncertainty was a natural and necessary part of the PAR process even if it felt uncomfortable for awhile. I am reminded of Reason's advice here that "whatever the degree of confusion, the challenge is for the inquirers to go with it for awhile, not pull out of it anxiously, but wait until there is a sense of creative resolution" (1988, p. 53). They acknowledged the significance of what happened, affirmed that this was going to be a longer process than anticipated, and agreed to allow space for the issue to find its own resolution.

The co-researchers participation and influence in the research process, along with their strong determination on behalf of the Early Head Start program, enhanced their capacity to see new possibilities for working together that were absent after their presentation to the Collaborative Board. Although our initial attempt to engage Collaborative Board members as co-researchers failed, it was important to find ways to keep connections. They used this initial failure to explore the potential for different avenues to capture the diverse perspectives and discourses of others who shape the conditions of life and work in our local setting.

The co-researchers remained committed to the PAR project throughout this period and exhibited a strong impetus to develop new strategies. This change in attitude led them to see new possibilities for developing relationships with Collaborative Board members and they decided to approach the matter more assertively. This was evident when Mary suggested the possibility of interacting with Collaborative Board members in a way that could be a better use of their time; possibly engaging them through a focus group. The co-researchers exhibited ownership of the project as they took this step to engage them in an alternative forum. They became more aware of the choices open to them and were more confident in articulating their view point.

A response emerged from the Collaborative Board as a result of co-researchers extending another invitation to them. This approach did serve to engage them and opened the dialogue to search for improved ways of providing services that would meet the needs and aspirations of Early Head Start families more genuinely. The direction of the PAR project was stimulated by opening conversation with the Collaborative Board members. It also brought the voices and perspectives of the co-researchers to the forefront. For instance, Mary courageously voiced her concerns to the Collaborative Board regarding what was not working for Early Head Start and made suggestions for alternative ways they could be more supportive.

This event represents a collective experience allowing them to have greater influence and voice and denotes a shift in how the co-researchers were

viewed by Collaborative Board members. They cultivated new skills that encouraged them to move forward to shape other actions during the PAR project.

Co-Researchers Reflections on Voice

During the Participatory Action Research Project

An essential feature of PAR is a commitment to reflection by participants on the process and results achieved. Dialogue was the relevant PAR tool that brought the co-researchers together to express and analyze their realities. A safe space was provided for this reflection to occur. They engaged in a process of critical reflection and built a discourse focused on connectedness, engagement and involvement with each other.

Initially, they were unaccustomed to a dialectical process of critique. However, in order to engage in a consciousness-raising process, they needed to be open to uncertainty and take direction of their own discussions. During a reflective session held six months into the PAR project, their growth in this ability was apparent. They were encouraged to reflect upon their experiences. Through their active participation they gained a much deeper understanding of themselves and were empowered to construct new forms of knowledge at a deeper level.

They gained confidence in their own voice as they worked together, exchanging ideas and learning about others points of view. Telling the stories of their experience was empowering because through the process of reflection, they brought meaning and life to the discussion. They critically reflected on these events and gained insight from that reflection. In the following section, I provide

excerpts from their dialogue to illustrate how they perceived their voice increased through the PAR process.

Empowerment

The PAR project demonstrated how the co-researchers were empowered to engage with and apply PAR principles to take a genuinely active role which strengthened their commitment and enhanced their contributions. They learned more about themselves, formulated actions to improve their situation and gained knowledge by carrying out these actions. They also acquired a stronger sense of self, enhanced knowledge of issues explored and increased their network to draw on. This was accomplished through the use of empowering strategies such as telling of, listening to and reflecting on the meaning of their experiences. Joan realized the potentials inherent to her:

I also realize I have more power over myself. There are opportunities for me to reach my potential. I understand that now and know if I stick with something I can conquer it. Being part of this project makes me feel if I did go back to work somewhere that I do have skills. Sometimes I'm down on myself and think I'm not on the same level as some people but this project showed me that I can pick things up--it makes me feel more empowered to live a better life.

The co-researchers were empowered through their involvement in discussions and implementations of the various actions. They made informed decisions rather than being passive recipients of choices made by others. This authority established their power within the research context. They recognized

that they had significant input into the direction of the project. They were energized by being involved, as noted by Amy's comment, "this is our research." They saw their work as valuable and having a purpose. At one point Joan stated, "I realize the importance of what we are doing."

They also reported that meeting as a group, discussing their shared problems, learning they were not alone, and developing a sense of inclusion and belonging were major benefits of their involvement. According to Amy, "I really feel part of something. It's been a long time since I felt that way." The sense of inclusion that the PAR project fostered was a result of a group process that worked toward acknowledging all voices. At one meeting, the co-researchers discussed the value of sharing the same problems. Beth stated, "knowing you're not alone, I like that. Knowing that we're all in the same shoes helps me realize I'm not to blame for my living situation." These discussions promoted feelings of togetherness and enhanced their willingness to be involved. This was empowering, because through a process of dialogue, each had a voice and shared views openly, connecting with each other in shared experiences. As a result of their reflection, the co-researchers created a deeper self-awareness which also was empowering.

Shared Power

The PAR project challenged the traditional research dynamics as the co-researchers kept control of the research in their hands. Restructuring the power dynamics of the research process in an effort to share power between researcher and co-researchers is a key aspect of PAR and demystified the research

process. The co-researchers demonstrated the capacity to make meaning out of the idea of shared power. For example, Mary commented:

This conversation brings me back to one of our first meetings when you challenged us right from the beginning to share power. You said you needed co-researchers to work with you. I really didn't feel comfortable or confident with that thought. But we all have been co-researchers; we've all had opportunities to take responsibility. There was never one designated person in charge. We divided the work good enough that that I can say each one of us has had the same chance of being in that role.

The process of interactions within a PAR process played a role in changing how the co-researchers viewed power in some situations. The concept of power was re-conceptualized through their own experiences. Authority, control and responsibility for the PAR project were spread across all of the Early Head Start mothers. Each took initiative, organized events, and performed other tasks needed for the project. Power was reframed as energy, effective interaction, and sharing resources with one another rather than domination of others. They were free to occupy different roles of facilitator, listener, observer, or to withdraw from the discussion. In any particular discussion some may have occupied one or another of these roles to a greater extent but over the life of the project, the co-researchers generally occupied the range of these roles at one time or another. Joan added:

We've all gone on home visits, we've all run focus groups, we've gone on trainings, and we've been out in the community talking, so it wasn't just you leading all the meetings.

Amy added another example of their ability to share power which emerged through their partnership and collaboration with one another:

We equally divided the work and took turns versus one person running every focus group or one person going one very single interview.

The co-researchers were able to differentiate power-over from power-with in these situations. They exhibited the capacity to develop power-with effectively as illustrated in Beth's description:

When we facilitated the focus groups, we were all willing to take a part.

Two of us ran the focus group and the other two took the kids and babysat them so their parents wouldn't be interrupted. Then we switched roles for the next focus group so we got experience doing both.

The co-researchers demonstrated shared ownership of the research project as they experienced power sharing processes.

Strengthening Voice

Discovering voice is central to PAR. The co-researchers developed reflexive insights around voice as a result of growing critical consciousness. They were encouraged to use their own language and hear their own voices in understanding what was happening to them and around them. They gained a heightened awareness of the power of voice found from within. This awareness

that their voices have value and should be heard demonstrated a consciousness-raising moment for Beth as she spoke of the value to express voice:

The new level of awareness I've reached through the work we've done is that people have a right to have a voice, to have a say and need to be treated equally and respectfully.

The PAR project created circumstances in which all of the co-researchers had a right to speak and take action, changing things for the better. They found meaningful opportunities to strengthen their voices as they evolved in their understanding of issues which is evident in Beth's statement: "I feel my voice made a contribution to this project."

While they discovered a sense of their capacity to speak, they also realized the importance of mobilization to get issues heard. They moved from finding voice to using voice as they made decisions regarding the direction of the PAR project. Mary remarked: "This project helped us speak up, but to speak up you need to be involved in the community somehow."

Their voice, developed through the project, sustained them in their commitment to new ways of communicating despite the occasional challenges and obstacles confronted along the way. Specifically, they shared consequences of actions taken which at times were painful, especially when initially rejected by the Collaborative Board and during the focus group with the Early Head Start staff. The co-researchers did not become paralyzed with met challenges; instead they noted and addressed barriers as temporary obstacles that became vehicles to create new learning and strengthened partnerships.

As a result of their ability to be in a sustained dialogue, the quality of the PAR process emerged over time. The co-researchers increased their sense of well-being as they shared their talents and strengths through meaningful opportunities to raise their voices. The expansion of their voice was seen through their growing confidence, willingness to challenge others and a commitment to make a difference in the Early Head Start program.

Encouraging Early Head Start Families to Find Voice

After the success of their interactions with the Collaborative Board members, the co-researchers momentum appeared to build. While there were many areas of concern for the co-researchers, they decided to reach out to other Early Head Start families and focused on gathering their stories. They frequently expressed that they felt a personal drive to ensure that all the Early Head Start families' voices were heard in order for changes to occur. They were very explicit on what they believed was worthy of their attention as noted by Sara's remark: "We don't want their voices to be lost."

Over 60 families responded to their letter indicating they wanted to participate in a focus group or individual interviews. The co-researchers felt responsible for taking their new found knowledge, sharing it with these families and ensuring their contributions were heard. They took a leadership role in moving in this direction and expressed a strong desire to help articulate voices that were not heard. One of their main motivating factors in wanting to interview Early Head Start families was to engage them in expressing their ideas on ways to improve the program as a whole. Simply put, Amy said: "We want to hear first

hand from the Early Head Start families what is important to them and how well they are doing in the program. I want to hear their concerns so we can find ways to help them.”

The co-researchers structured the focus groups and interviews to be respectful to the families. They each had an opportunity to lead focus groups and participate in interviews with Early Head Start families in their homes. They asked questions that clearly enabled the families to share their thoughts and opinions. The overall structure of their interviews illustrates a non-intrusive approach as it revolved more around a conversation rather than a structured interview. They were not met with resistance. They approached the interviews with respect for others and concern for their welfare. Specifically, the co-researchers conducting the interviews simply asked questions and allowed family members to answer at their own pace.

Early Head Start families were given the opportunity to express the full range of their experiences. They were encouraged to talk in detail about their concerns. They openly participated in the interviews and discussed the value and concerns with the Early Head Start program in their lives as well as offered some solutions to improve services. Their participation also helped legitimize the knowledge claims of ordinary people. They were more open to talking and listening to the co-researchers due to their non-threatening and informative approach. They listened to the families with a commitment that their voices would be heard this time. Amy shared:

Parents are talking about the program and we’re getting the good with the

bad. From their perspective we're hearing that they do tell the home visitors things and they say ok, but a year goes by and nothing has changed.

The co-researchers were also perceived as insiders as they too were associated with the program. They understood the multiple barriers families experienced in their lives. The families responded favorably and willingly invited them into their homes. By asking families what was working or not for them, the co-researchers were not imposing their ideas, but instead giving them space to talk about their understandings of the program. This provided an alternative way of gathering information for the program. The determination to educate and change conditions stems from the co-researchers' understanding of the same issues. Specifically, Mary replied:

When we go into the homes to do the interviews we go as a team. We're getting good information because we can say to the parents we're in this program too, and that happened to me, or I understand. It's just a whole different way of being heard.

As the co-researchers shared the families' stories with each other, it strengthened their commitment to work for changes that could benefit the Early Head Start program. Their conversations with families gave rise to new challenges and considerations about quality and effectiveness of the program. They appeared driven by personal commitments to contribute to improving the situation. The co-researchers took deliberate steps to explore and pursue several opportunities to gain information on ways to improve program conditions.

They shared accounts of the existing conditions discovered through their interviews with families, discussed its meaning and importance to them. Mary shared:

The focus groups and interviews were eye-openers for me. I know all programs have their faults but I have learned that this one has way more than what I could ever imagine happening. There are good things and that is good, but the parents are openly and honestly coming forward with what's not working, or how their ideas and stuff they've suggested and they really haven't heard any feedback. I think they were hurt in that they didn't feel valued in someway. That was the sense that I got.

Others offered similar perspectives and feedback as Joan joined in:

I think there's a lot of positive and I think that when we go over these interviews together, there is a lot of positive, but I think because the bad has been "more bad" than I thought it would be--it just sticks out more. I hadn't expected that level. I see it as disrespect.

Their desire to search for more meaningful avenues to address their central concerns is evident in many of the accounts shared. For instance, Mary was clear about her motivation and vision for the program:

Meeting with the different families really makes me think about how important it is for the program staff to find out what is really working now but also the long term benefits as well. Parent involvement is the key. Staff needs to work on being more non-judgmental. They might not say things specifically but families pick upon it. Our families need to be seen

as valued members and given opportunities to speak up. We need to take responsibility together if we care about the future of Early Head Start. If a parent comes up with an idea that works better it needs to be implemented so everyone can benefit from it. We need to use their ideas better and more often.

Changes Perceived by Co-Researchers

Access to Relevant Knowledge Contributed to Changes

PAR is aimed at both generating knowledge and producing action that leads to change. The co-researchers were involved in both of these aspects as they developed the capacity to enact action plans. As they gained relevant knowledge, it mobilized them to use the information to increase their control over the direction of the PAR project. Sara stated: “After we got comfortable and understood action research more, we saw how our ideas were important. It just got us to open up more.” Through access to knowledge and participation in its production, the co-researchers confidence grew and they were able to exercise greater influence and voice in designing and implementing the PAR project in order to make changes in the Early Head Start program.

This education also broadened the co-researchers perspectives and set in motion their decisions regarding the direction of the PAR project. They moved forward with a sense of empowerment grounded in content knowledge and the capacity to access additional resources as needed. They discussed many collective actions that were implemented and achieved in the course of our work together. They embraced the PAR principles as they shifted their voices into

action and performed important tasks through significant levels of active involvement as noted by Mary:

You've just shown us what we've done since February and just to look at that I'm like Wow, that's a lot of stuff. Look at what we've accomplished. When you brought in the book last Monday and showed us all the data and things that we've come through, I thought, we sure have been busy! Hopefully, we're going to see changes so we know we're headed somewhere instead of just left behind

All of these actions mobilized their energy, engaged their enthusiasm, and generated activity that was productively applied to the problems that concerned them. They searched for goals within their reach and continued the collaboration needed to make a difference even when achievements seemed small.

Increased Insights

Critical dialogue requires questioning assumptions. Reflections on preconceived notions and ideas challenged the co-researchers perspectives. They spoke at length about how their perceptions changed as a result of the PAR project. Specifically, listening to the voices of households who are poor provided a deeper understanding of the multiple dimensions of poverty. A poignant dialogue captures their shift in thinking as they reflected on the levels of poverty seen in the homes of Early Head Start families they interviewed. Mary reflected:

It was a real eye-opener for me to see some of the families had so little and seemed so stuck. I live in poverty but this really showed me the depth of poverty on our community. You hear about it, but to see it really had a

different impact on me. It changed me by realizing there are different levels of poverty and there are different needs.

The process of critical reflection also revealed how the attitude of others, including their own, led to inaccurate and distorted images. This was made obvious when they came face to face with distorted representations of other Early Head Start families and became aware of how they also subscribed to and accepted these attitudes at times. For instance, Early Head Start staff were continually discouraged at the lack of parental involvement in other Early Head Start activities, such as playgroup, parent committee and policy council, and frequently blamed the families for not following through with commitments. Their non-participation was often interpreted as their own apathy or inefficacy. Sara remarked:

Seeing how people have to struggle just to make ends meet . . . no wonder it's so hard for them to come to playgroups and parent groups policy council. How do people pull themselves out when it is so bad? The reason they don't participate in some of these things isn't because they are lazy; they have more pressing concerns and what matters to them often differs from what others think they should be.

This reflection challenged the assumption of why families were not more involved in the program. The co-researchers experienced seeing things from the families' points of view and grasped the depth of their situations, realizing that their criteria and choices were different than those assumed by the professionals. They learned about issues beyond their own immediate concerns and increased

their compassion for other Early Head Start families. They realized the extent of the challenges associated with the stress of the demands upon them due to their economic situations. Amy added:

Maybe for others to understand the situation of the low income group they need to live on welfare income for several months. People shouldn't be living like that. With all the wealth in our country, why aren't people living better? I hope that someday we really do have the means to help people out of poverty

In order for the co-researchers to make sense of their experiences, they questioned conventional concepts and realities. Within a context of continuing dialogue, their knowledge of households who are poor changed once they interacted with Early Head Start families. As they looked back and questioned their own beliefs, they expressed the need for people to change the way they relate to one another. Joan conveyed a more empathetic understanding for their situations:

They are all good people. I hope there's going to be more of an appreciation for people who are poor and appreciation for what they are actually trying to do with their lives and the good things about them and get rid of the stigmas. I know I probably won't see poverty eliminated in my lifetime, but I hope that my children, by seeing me involved in things like this, can see the value of treating people better and take that into their next generation.

The co-researchers participation in this reflection empowered them to analyze and express their realities about the different dimensions of poverty and the prevailing attitudes found within their own program. It increased their sensitivity and responsiveness to the needs of a larger group and responded to their concerns with “what are we going to do next?”

Changes in their understandings demonstrates how involving the Early Head Start mothers in the research process brought forth new insights, priorities, and definitions of issues to be addressed. This led to changes in their knowledge and therefore a change of assumptions. However, these new insights did not occur in one singular turning point, but through an iterative long-term process of learning, ongoing reflection, and analysis.

New Opportunities with Collaborative Board Members

Opportunities emerged that facilitated change brought about by the co-researchers active involvement in the project. Specifically, their second attempt to engage Collaborative Board members facilitated a change in the climate among the group members and the nature of the discourse about the responsibilities of the Collaborative Board to Early Head Start families. The co-researchers wanted them to understand the issues from their perspective and also wanted them to contribute solutions. Through this dialogue, the co-researchers located common areas of agreement with the Collaborative Board members. They responded with a shared sense that a problem existed and needed to be addressed. This focus on shared concerns helped to reduce the

perceived distance, highlighted the possibility of expanding relationships, and generated space for potential collaborations.

Through discussion, the Collaborative Board members identified the need to clarify their role as governing board for Early Head Start along with re-defining their responsibilities. The dialogue became more inclusive as the Early Head Start mothers engaged in opened dialogue with them about the nature of the problems they experienced and ways the board structure could be changed to address some of these problems. Other suggestions included making the Early Head Start report a priority on the monthly agenda, convening a smaller Governing Board to review how governance was being carried out in order to make it more effective and potentially participate in the data analysis of the PAR project. As a result, recommendations were made from the group to take to the next Collaborative Board meeting. The co-researchers created an opportunity to have input into Collaborative Board policies and affected the board process. They had developed the capacity to participate effectively in shaping the Collaborative Board's agenda.

The co-researchers concerns resonated with the Collaborative Board and convinced them of the need to do things differently at their meetings. The issues discussed were on the Collaborative Board agenda the following month, brought to a vote and approved. Through this PAR project, the co-researchers became actively involved and ultimately influenced local decision making through the Focus On Our Future Collaborative Board. This experience affirmed that their voices made a difference and legitimized their collective commitment to the PAR

project. The co-researchers viewed this meeting as a critical, defining moment for the PAR project. Mary described the evidence of the emerging partnership: “This meeting was so different than the one with the whole Collaborative Board. It felt like they wanted to help us do this”

What also came out of this dialogue was an improved capacity for developing ideas and pursuing them into action. The co-researchers actively contributed to strengthening alliances. An aim of the PAR project was to change ways in which systems and organizations think about Early Head Start in their community. A critical task of PAR includes widening the group of people in tasks, often in the face of established ways of doing things. The focus group set the stage to move in this direction.

These findings illustrate the inherent challenges that faced the co-researchers of this project as they worked to engage others to enter into the PAR project. It also demonstrates the unpredictable nature of creating a PAR project. This event was very affirming for the Early Head Start mothers; the PAR project opened a communicative space that had previously been unavailable to them. While this form of engagement was very demanding, it generated a sense that alternative ways of doing things were possible. It also demonstrated that when the co-researchers confronted established ways of doing things, they played a decisive role in changing the climate in their relationship with the Collaborative Board members.

Since the co-researchers found a way to respond differently to the Collaborative Board, they were now able to tell their stories differently. Their

feelings of frustration and powerless experienced early on dissipated as they shared power with the Collaborative Board. Their individual knowledge and expertise regarding the Early Head Start program was valued.

Co-Researchers Perspectives on What Aspects of the
Participatory Action Research Project
Contributed to Their Experience

Actions occurred as a consequence of the co-researchers intense involvement in the project. The PAR project provided a venue for creating a shared vision between them. It also gave them the tools and opportunities to seek ways to collectively effect change in their everyday lives. In the following section, the co-researchers discuss aspects of the PAR project that were beneficial to them while they were involved in this study, specifically spaces created for dialogue.

Creating Spaces for Dialogue Built and Enhanced Relationships

The formation of an environment for participation and collaboration also opened space for communication and dialogue at a level where there was none before. The co-researchers shared their perspectives on what they believed led to authentic engagement and helped them develop the belief that they had a right to be heard. All affirmed that working in a small group provided the best opportunity for building this atmosphere in that it gave them the opportunity to engage in greater depth than if the group had been larger. They emphasized

mutual respect, listening, and open-mindedness as essential to developing collaborative working relationships and enhancing trust. Mary stated:

I think that because we were a small group, we were able to help each other more. It was more comfortable to share our talents and strengths and stuff. If it had been a larger group, I don't think I could've opened up as much. But with this group we felt comfortable to ask questions we didn't understand. And whoever could answer the questions just spoke up.

The co-researchers also shared that the ability to listen carefully helped foster intimacy and trust. They were encouraged to listen affirmatively to the voices of others and viewed communication as essential to gaining new insights in to their interactions with one another. Sara commented:

We don't criticize each other. We listen to each other respectfully, even if we don't agree. Everyone has a right to an opinion. We weren't being made fun of so that gave us the power to open up more.

Amy corroborated:

That's the way I feel about this group too. We all have our opinions and at least they are heard and taken in to consideration. They might not be put into action today but years down the road they might work. What's important is getting to know other people and trying to change things together.

Their affirmation of each other's voice was a way they granted worth, and honored and validated the other's concerns.

The co-researchers also communicated how the importance of sensitivity toward one another's life situation contributed to enhancing their relationships. They frequently expressed empathy with each others difficulties and increased their ability to respond to the variety of concerns expressed. Mary shared:

I've learned that we really didn't criticize weaknesses of the people at our table. I see it; people probably see it every day in society where people get made fun of for what we have. We weren't being made fun of here when we couldn't spell or understand a word. We weren't stopped from participating because we didn't understand some words

Sara provided an example of her vulnerability and how her relationship with the group gave her the strength to try to do things differently:

I don't like reading to people. Reading is different than being able to talk. I don't like to read--I refused to read in school. I hate it. I just don't feel like I'm a strong enough reader to do it. I feel bad reading to my son. When I talk from my heart it's so much different. Even though this is a safe place, I was afraid to read in front of all of you since I'm not a good reader. But I feel part of this group, so I challenged myself to do it.

The co-researchers recognized the benefits of working together in a participatory way and took advantage of the opportunities for dialogue in safe spaces. They successfully facilitated the emergence of a communicative space that portrayed caring, sincerity, and trust.

Early Head Start Staff: Observations of Their
Experience of Exclusion from the
Participatory Action Research Project

The Early Head Start staff expected to participate in the PAR project. I kept them continually informed of the progress of my proposal and then the final decision of the IRB to exclude them from the research. The PAR project was now excluded from any discussion.

As the co-researchers and myself gathered valuable new knowledge and insights related to Early Head Start, we were unable to share this information with them. For instance, the co-researchers and I met weekly behind closed doors in the conference room at our agency. We began our meetings with a meal and socialization before working diligently on the weekly agenda. Our meetings usually lasted beyond the regular work day. We spent considerable time together and developed close relationships as our deep investment in the PAR values grew. We distanced ourselves from engaging in a mutual learning situation with the Early Head Start staff, leaving them to form their own ideas about what was happening in their agency regarding their program. They remained deprived of information that affected them in important ways.

It also generated tensions between the co-researchers and the Early Head Start staff as evidenced in interactions between the two groups as the research process continued. For instance, after six months into our study, the co-researchers expressed frustration with changes they perceived to have occurred

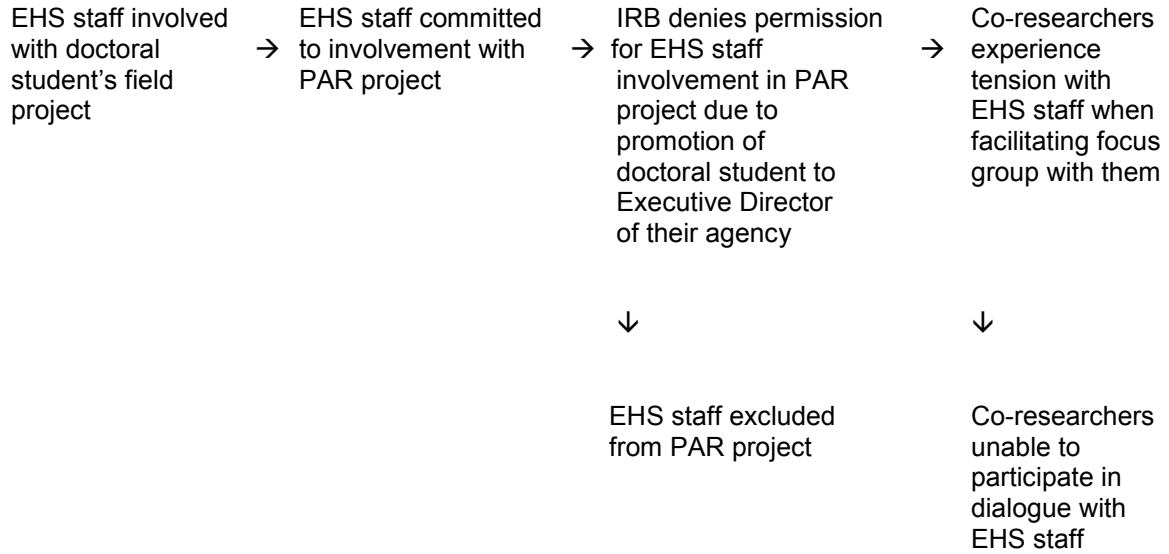


Figure 2. Key events for Early Head Start staff.

between themselves and the Early Head Start staff. They noted points of struggle and conflict especially during the focus groups they conducted with them. They shared their perceptions about changes in relationships they experienced during those times. Mary stated that she perceived that the staff did not feel comfortable with the co-researchers facilitating the focus group: “Maybe they felt like they were being threatened.”

Several staff also refused to sit at the table, even though the co-researchers repeatedly asked them to join. Amy observed: “It was like they didn’t want to listen to us.” The co-researchers expressed strong emotions over this, perceiving that the Early Head Start staff treated them in a condescending manner. As Joan stated: “they think they are better than other people.”

It became apparent through this dialogue that tensions emerged between the co-researchers and Early Head Start staff, tensions that may be related to their exclusion from the PAR project. They had no direct voice in the project; any changes they perceived were not shared openly. We did not have access to what aspects of the project contributed to this experience for them.

Practitioner/Researcher’s Experience

Introduction

As a practitioner/researcher in this PAR project, I experienced both the promises and perils of this research approach and came to appreciate the possibilities and challenges of PAR. I encountered the potential of PAR as an ethical praxis of care in which primacy is placed upon relationships and working

with people, as opposed to just not doing harm. Challenges that emerged related to conducting a PAR study as a doctoral student. As I attempted to develop a partnership with the IRB, I encountered many barriers instead. Figure 3 highlights these barriers. This is followed by my description of two selected experiences that impacted me during this study; my relationships with the IRB and the co-researchers.

Differing Epistemologies and Assumptions Between Institutional Review Board and Participatory Action Research

IRBs are federally mandated institutional committees that must conform to federal regulations regarding human subjects' research. These requirements specify the procedures and standards for reviewing proposed research. The guidelines primarily provide research subjects with the opportunity to decline to participate in a particular study which is addressed through the informed consent process. IRBs are required to demonstrate that due diligence has been performed to avoid harm to human subjects. The IRB also operate from a conventional, tiered hierarchy of power relations. Specifically, this gave them power over me, the researcher, in that the IRB has the power to withhold approval of my research project and required modification of the research design prior to their approval.

PAR is a type of research approach that seeks to create knowledge to produce social change by involving stakeholders with diverse experiences and capacities. This is achieved through an open-ended, collaborative approach

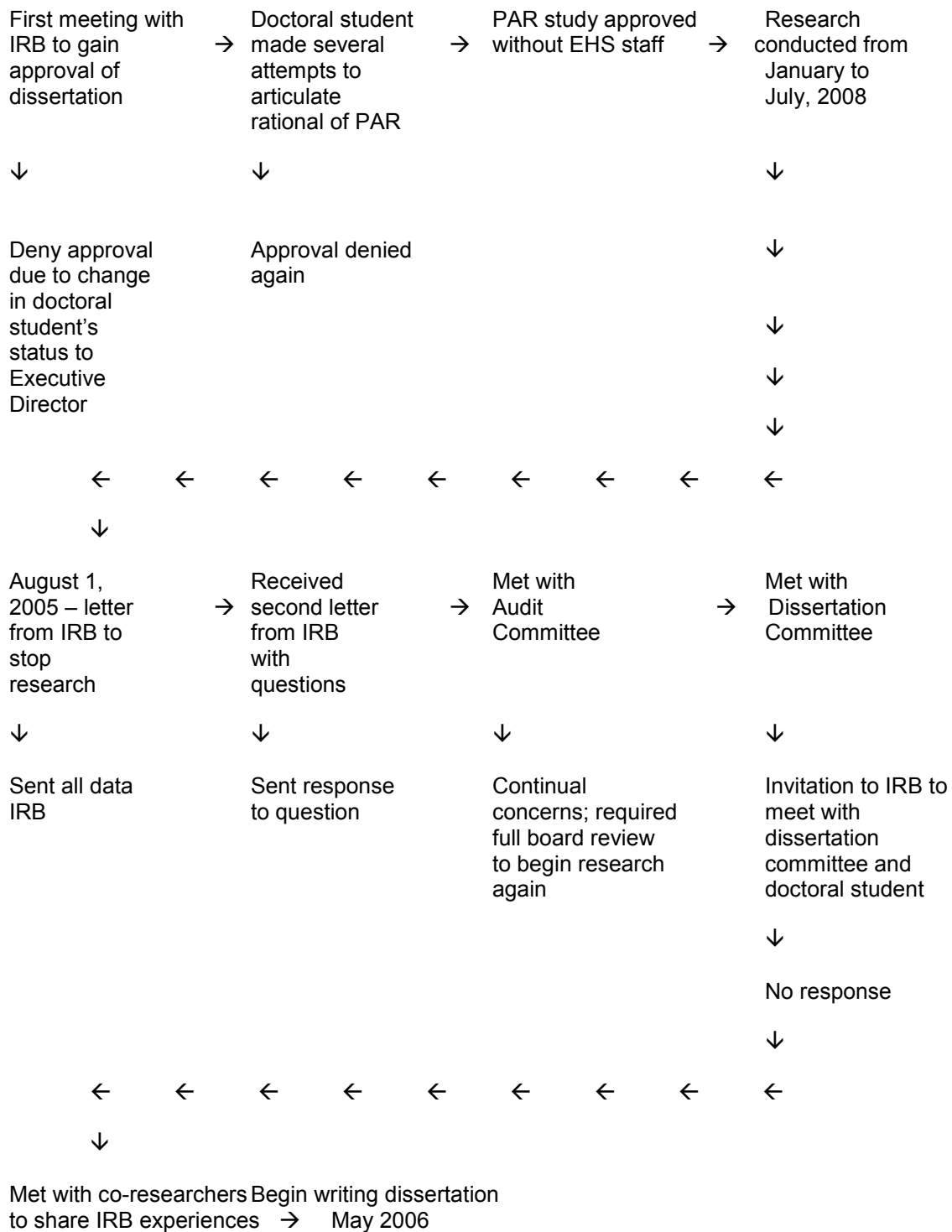


Figure 3. Barriers incurred.

without specific methods identified in advance. PAR engages those whose lives are impacted by the research issue directly into the research process. For example, within this PAR project, the co-researchers were actively engaged in the research design, data gathering and analysis, and planned to be involved in interpreting the findings. In my role of researcher, I sought to share the power inherent in knowledge generation with the co-researchers involved in the PAR project.

It became apparent during the approval process that members of the IRB and I held differing perspectives on research practice itself. Some of the tensions may have derived from our difficulty in recognizing and reconciling the different values, assumptions, and priorities informing the other's position. An example of the differences in our research assumptions is illustrated in an excerpt from our correspondence:

To assure anonymity and to ensure the researcher will not know the participants, create and explain in detail a complete two group process.

The one group will be the actual participants and the second group will not be part of the study. Describe what safeguards will be in place so the researcher does not know who participates in the study (May 5, 2004).

In contrast, I sought to create co-generative dialogues among multiple stakeholders providing a diversity of views. I did not want to impose a particular structure based on specific questions as my research involved observing what would emerge when the participant took an active role in generating the research

priorities, making decisions, and assigning responsibilities.. I attempted to articulate the objectives and rationale (see Appendix G):

Once the co-research team is formed, I will know who chose to participate in the study; this is a team approach; all members will be fully informed.

How we proceed from here will be negotiated. Having their involvement from the beginning will be important for building trust and developing a sense of engagement and ownership among all partners; it will provide a good foundation for a respectful partnership to guide the study. The final team will collaborate as co-researchers in this project (May 5, 2004).

This exchange reflects differences in our understandings of the objectives of research practice. I attempted to illustrate the research value of PAR by offering alternative ways of thinking about the concerns the IRB expressed, but the gulf remained apparent. In particular, I saw myself struggling to establish the legitimacy of PAR, expressing my perspective on risks vs. benefits of engaging Early Head Start staff. I believed the benefits for them to have the opportunity to be involved in a research project from beginning to end, and learn valuable skills that could lead to changes in their community far out weighed the potential risks of their involvement.

However, despite my efforts to keep visible what I saw as the key research priorities in this context, I was not able to engage the IRB in authentic dialogue but encountered responses based on regulatory requirements instead. The IRB similarly challenged my protocol in areas such as subject selection,

separation of roles, social/economic risk, and researcher closeness to subjects citing several websites for me to visit in order to validate their position.

During the several months I was involved in correspondence with the IRB, they maintained this position of tight compliance with their understanding of the federal regulations. However, these encounters with the IRB also suggested that they were committed to the positivist epistemology underlying traditional academic research. They expected that the researcher seeking approval for their research study adapt not only to the regulations but to the traditional epistemology as well. It appeared that the IRB's current structure for reviewing protocols and their definitions of research lacked the flexibility to understand or accept an alternative form of research. Their decisions were significant in altering the direction of this PAR study including negative impacts at the local level among the co-research group as a whole. However, a significant clash in assumptions involved dual-role conflict in the PAR project.

Dual-Role Conflict

PAR's empowering approach and the IRB's established codes of conduct represent another area of differing epistemologies. In particular, the IRB had strong concerns about my status as Executive Director of a Social Service Agency. They presented their perspectives regarding my dual-role status and determined that "this change in the researcher's status with the agency resulted in a dual role conflict (director/researcher)." In a written correspondence they indicated that:

She is likely to have an indirect or informal influence over staffing decisions even though she has no formal control over them. It is reasonable to expect that this would lead to a perception by employees that staffing and programmatic decisions are within the scope of her employment, thus leading to the existence of a dual role (director/researcher) (June 29, 2004).

They requested clearly defined safeguards to protect staff from any employment risks they could encounter by choosing to participate as co-researchers. They expressed concern that:

The protections against the greater than minimal risks are not provided given her research design that includes a high level of closeness and direct contact with the research participants (June 29, 2004).

I argued that their inclusion would give Early Head Start staff voice to critically analyze their experiences with other key stakeholders. I contended their participation could increase the capacity to generate knowledge relevant to the Early Head Start program. From the beginning I stressed that multiple voices needed to be captured and valued. I struggled to translate the practice of “power with” vs. “power over” to the IRB. My final effort to persuade them spoke to increased benefits not only to the Early Head Start program but for the staff as well.

The IRB was not persuaded by this argument. They held strongly to their convictions that there was too much risk involved to permit the Early Head Start staff the opportunity to participate. The only way they would allow staff to

participate was for me to clarify how I could “remain unbiased, maintain distance and avoid the perception of conflict of interest.” Despite our discussions and written correspondence, I was not able to articulate the necessary clarification they requested. My inability to avoid what they perceived as a conflict of interest and remain unbiased continued to be an issue for the IRB. They believed that the potential harm of this situation was too great of a risk and denied Early Head Start staff involvement in the project.

There was also evidence of the importance of protecting the university. At a review meeting held in June 2004, members of the IRB stated that this protection also included shielding the university from liability. Specifically, their main concern suggested that if during the PAR project an Early Head Start staff member was fired for something unrelated to the project, it could be perceived that the firing occurred because of their involvement or non involvement in the project. This could result in holding the University liable, and they were unwilling to take this risk.

The project received final IRB approval on August 24, 2004; five months after my dissertation committee approved my proposal. It was approved when I made changes to only include Early Head Start parents and community stakeholders. Early Head Start staff, initial partners in developing the outcomes tool, were excluded from the project.

Experience of “For Cause” Audit

During the course of carrying out the PAR project more differing assumptions led to the interruption of my research study. As discussed in

Chapter Five, I received a letter on August 1, 2005, after eight months of carrying out the study with the co-researchers, stating that a subcommittee of the University IRB needed to perform a “for cause” audit of my research project as a result of information they received regarding my research. I was to stop all research immediately and send them all the research data I had to date. For cause audits are conducted when there are concerns about whether or not the rights and welfare of participants enrolled in a particular research protocol are being adequately protected. While I complied with their requests, I was never informed of the exact nature of the concern that resulted in this audit. As a result of their lack of clarity and inability to share information regarding the specific nature of the “for cause” audit, it is difficult for me to write about it. Therefore, the following interpretation is from my own experiences regarding the events of this period.

After the IRB reviewed the data I submitted, they responded with 17 questions, which were provided in Chapter Five. Several were similar questions discussed in past reviews, but the question regarding the typist appeared to me to be at the center of this particular controversy. Specifically, they had questions regarding the preparation of the typed transcripts, such as, “Who has prepared the typed transcripts from interviews, meetings, and focus groups? Is the typist a member of the co-research team?” They continued with concerns regarding confidentiality:

We remain concerned about whether the typist will be able to identify individuals who are being discussed and as she may be a co-worker of

some individuals, how this may affect long-term staff relations. Please discuss your plans to transcribe future tape recordings.

I attempted to clarify this situation with the IRB by providing them with evidence of the importance of confidentiality in my agency. I gave them with a copy of our confidentiality statement which “assures confidentiality and protection of individual rights to privacy for children, families, volunteers, and employees of Community Services of Venango County, Inc.” The final paragraph of the confidentiality policy states:

I understand that any violation of the Confidentiality Policy or the conditions contained in this Confidentiality statement will be considered as a serious infraction of CSVC policy and will lead to disciplinary action up to and including immediate termination of my employment. (In the agency’s original confidentiality statement, this section is in bold letters to stress the extreme seriousness of violating this policy.)

I presented the Audit Team evidence of the typist signing this statement upon hire on November 1, 2001. I also made them aware of the support I received from my Governing Board prior to beginning the project. I gave them a letter dated October 24, 2005 and signed by the Executive Committee of the agency’s Governing Board of Director’s stating:

This letter is to inform you that the Governing Board of Director’s of Community Services of Venango County, Inc. is in full support of our Executive Director’s Participatory Action Research project and dissertation. We have approved and committed the necessary resources

needed to successfully complete both of these projects. These resources include both financial and administrative support needed during this time. We strongly believe that the results will not only benefit our Executive Director, Barbara Feroz, but the agency and community as well.

The Audit Team was not satisfied with these responses and required more clarity from me on how the confidentiality of participants was maintained in terms of exposure they may receive as the typist transcribes tapes.

They deemed these problems reflected poor judgment in the research design along with a naïve assumption about mitigating the dilemmas created by dual roles. In a letter I received on November 11, 2005, the IRB stated that difficulties continued as a consequence of my ambiguous roles:

While these roles may be clear to you, they may not consistently be so in the minds clear of the individuals with whom you are interacting in the process.

A traditional institutional approval process played a decisive role in defining the boundaries of the PAR project. In order for this study to continue, the IRB imposed the following: “you will have to submit for full board review” It was at this point I scheduled a meeting with my dissertation committee regarding the direction of this PAR study.

Establishing Credibility with Co-Researchers

While tensions with the IRB were not resolved during this dissertation, it was important that I establish my credibility with the Early Head Start mothers in order for us to work effectively. As noted in Chapter Five, they developed

relationships with each other within the Early Head Start program and the strength of their relationship was evident throughout the PAR project. They entered the PAR project with a common commitment to improve their program.

While the co-researchers had a relationship with each other, they were just beginning their connection with me. Therefore, I needed to continually look for opportunities to build rapport with the Early Head Start mothers and to engage them in becoming active partners in the process from the beginning.

One of our very first meetings brought my sincerity to the forefront. I presented an initial draft of a letter inviting other Early Head Start parents to join us, and my co-researchers gave immediate and frank feedback: “this is too wordy, too academic; if I got this in the mail, I’d toss it in the garbage!” When I asked them what they thought would get other parents attention, they gave input on how to reword it and how the format needed to be changed. They took charge from there and divided responsibilities on getting the next draft back to the group. When we reflected on this event later, Sara shared her thoughts on this experience: “I was intimidated at first, but when we told you the letter needed to be changed and you asked us to do it, I felt like a valuable player then, because that’s the one we sent out.”

The others remembered that incident and felt it played an important role in strengthening our relationship. Joan commented that she was pleased that I acknowledged Sara’s concern and immediately asked the group for a better way to re-write the letter. She told Sara how impressed she was with her comments and to see change happen as a result of her taking a risk to challenge me early

on in our work together. Mary stated that an important aspect of increasing my credibility with her was seeing that I made mistakes just like them:

We see you lose things and forget stuff; you're just like us--human beings. Not everybody's perfect, I mean you might say--you'd love to be this person because they're so good at what they do and things like that but honestly they make the same mistakes that you would make.

Incidents such as these assisted with establishing reliability and provided the Early Head Start mothers with an opportunity to become more comfortable with me.

We worked together, exchanged opinions and ideas and learned about each others points of view. We invested the time to develop a good foundation for a respectful partnership approach. Such actions created a non-threatening context that enabled us to begin a PAR project in an atmosphere of mutual trust and acceptance.

Practitioner/Researcher's Reflection on Voice

During the Participatory Action Research Project

When I wrote my protocol for this dissertation, I embarked on an unknown journey. The enthusiasm that I gained from theorizing PAR and the confidence that I gained from the literature began to crumble in the face of the many constraints that I had to face in practice and the recognition that some of these dilemmas had no ultimate solutions.

Through my active involvement in this project, I discovered as part of my reflections, that power asymmetries permeated all relationships in this PAR

project, and that power and voice were repeatedly interwoven among all of the findings. As a student researcher presenting a PAR project to the IRB, I immediately faced power issues and lack of voice as I attempted PAR in a university setting. I did not expect to encounter these hierarchical issues at this scholarly level. I discovered that there is not much written on how to navigate in this environment and frequently questioned my capability as a doctoral student to traverse these un-chartered waters during this ambiguous period.

While I experienced the controversial nature of PAR as I met with the IRB, I had not thought through the implications of the project in terms of the emotional places it would take me. While I knew I would be personally involved, I did not realize the demands that the affective aspect of this research would place on me. For instance, the several encounters I had with the IRB impacted my sense of identity and confidence.

The commitment to be transparent required a more self-critical approach as I ventured on this emotional journey. I experienced both joy and pain in working with others. The emotional energy expended throughout this project strengthened me along with my resolve and commitment to PAR. I realized that to be a good PAR researcher I needed a wide range of skills to which some would remain incomplete. To commit to PAR is to commit to lifelong learning.

Also through this critical reflection process, I became aware of the similarities and differences in interactions between the co-researchers, myself, the practitioner/researcher and the IRB. The co-researchers and I worked to change assumptions with different stakeholder groups in the face of established

way of doing business. Several similarities and differences on power and voice became visible during the PAR project between their experiences and my own. I reflect on these in the following section.

*Comparisons of Similarities of the Participatory Action Research Project
Experience Between Co-Researchers and Practitioner/Researcher*

Both the co-researchers and I experienced rejection in spaces we thought we would be heard. For the co-researchers, it was at their initial Collaborative Board meeting and I experienced it several times during my interactions with the IRB. Similarities included constraints, indifference, limited choices, exclusion, disrespect, and inequality. Our ideas were discounted, our presence appeared to not be important at meetings, and we felt out of place. The co-researchers reflections on these events were discussed in previous sections; below are reflections on my experience of not being heard.

Lack of voice. Tensions increased between the IRB and myself as a result of their continued requests for multiple reviews. I was required to submit answers to their questions in which I needed to define and re-define the nature of the problems they identified. I found the increased scrutiny from the IRB to be quite a tremendous task, causing me significant frustration and leaving me exhausted. For example, their investigation and follow-up put this study on hold for nine months as they had specific measures they directed me to follow to rectify some of the problems that were uncovered in the course of their audit in order for me to receive renewal of my research. They wanted further explanation

of these issues “that they believed warranted clarification before they decided what actions were appropriate to pursue.”

I no longer knew what direction to pursue. I felt inadequate in that I could not find the words to explain my perspective to them any more clearly. I experienced marginalization by these events through the tone of their letters, the long delays and the atmosphere in the room as I was defending my position. I experienced my voice as being trivialized and irrelevant to the problem or solution during this time. In the end, I felt my attempts failed to strengthen the legitimization of PAR in a university setting.

Comparison of Differences of the Participatory Action Research Project Between Co-Researchers and Practitioner/Researcher

Power with vs. power over. The co-researchers and I experienced struggle and conflict during the PAR project and willingly worked to find ways to challenge them. While the co-researchers initially met resistance with the Collaborative Board, they persisted in finding a way to be heard and were successful in engaging them in relevant dialogue. They were able to use their voices to influence the Collaborative Board to try an alternative way of doing things. They created participatory environments, strengthened collaborative relationships, developed partnerships, and negotiated power. They generated alternate ways of doing things and influenced the Collaborative Board to make changes. The co-researchers experienced power “with” during the PAR project.

I also had multiple opportunities to challenge the structure and authority of the IRB. While I persisted in my attempts to persuade them that the benefits of

working in a participatory manner outweighed the risks, they maintained the power to define what would be the acceptable scientific approach for this study. After several failed attempts to engage them in relevant dialogue, one last effort was made to extend an invitation to meet with my dissertation committee and me with the hope of promoting a more constructive understanding and perhaps even improve future encounters between us. However, they managed to keep distance from us by declining the invitation.

My interactions with the IRB were impersonal, hierarchical, and bureaucratic. I experienced a suppression of ideas that was not fruitful; I was unable to think through the complexity inherent in the problems created through this research project without their input. As I challenged their power, I came up against institutional obstacles that sustained a “power over” and controlled the direction of this study. I entered their space, but found myself without voice, experiencing my own internalized powerlessness there.

As I experienced these difficulties and reflected on them, eventually I was able to stop seeing them as a result of my own inadequacies. I was able to place these encounters within a wider context of the culture of the IRB. I recognized that others’ framing of a situation are important for them and they have a claim to recognition of their views. The IRB distanced themselves from engagement in a mutual learning situation based on their values and assumptions that were not the values of collaboration and inquiry. It was a missed opportunity to possibly look at this dissertation differently in order to participate in the struggle together

to gain new insights and better ways to conduct PAR in a university setting that could provide benefits to all involved.

Changes Perceived by Practitioner/Researcher

The PAR project was more than just putting theory into practice with the co-researchers. It involved attending to my own learning and development as a parallel process to working with the co-researchers. It was a transformational process, grounded in collective participation and practical experience. The PAR project provided the opportunity for all to experience consciousness-raising, which, in the ideal PAR project gives way to transformative change. This allowed us to touch upon questions that led us to move toward a more comprehensive and critical perspective about ourselves. Just as the co-researchers articulated several changes they experienced during the PAR project in previous sections, I also experienced many unanticipated changes that enhanced my critical consciousness.

I was strongly influenced by the research process and experienced changes as a result of being part of this type of study. I needed to commit to developing new capabilities that required a deeper level of insight, inquiry, and understanding of the dynamics of the PAR project in this context. I was committed to become a better researcher. I learned from the co-researchers words, existing research and critical interpretations of my own experiences to create changes in myself and others impacted by the PAR project.

During my involvement in the PAR project, I encountered a number of opportunities to test myself that resulted in an increase in personal confidence

and a greater sense of self. For example, preparing all the required documentation requested by the IRB and presenting it to the audit committee increased my belief in myself to accomplish something new and difficult, as well as find alternative ways to handle previously tough situations.

The most central impact concerned changes in my personal perspectives that affected fundamental ideas. The PAR project is a tribute to the complexity of human beings in defying the objectivity of positivist researchers. This journey began from within with a willingness to examine deeply held beliefs and to foster an inquiring approach. In the following section, I discuss some changes in conceptual understanding that I experienced through critical reflection.

Practitioner/Researcher Conscientization

PAR aims to change the researcher as well. The capacity to be critically reflective increased my ability to gain awareness of the complexities involved in the PAR process. My connection to the research deepened my own conscientization process as I embraced reflective practice, critical thinking, self-awareness, capacity for growth, development, and change. The PAR project not only worked toward changing outcomes for Early Head Start families, it also challenged me to learn new skills and competencies that increased my capacities for learning. The critical learning that I gained in the PAR project pushed me to think about things I may never have considered before, critically reflect on experiences from the field, and seek what was necessary to help a change process keep moving. Critical reflection provided me with an avenue to explore

power inequities by accessing multiple ways of knowing that deepened my learning and capabilities to facilitate this PAR process.

My reflective practice produced changes that go beyond intellectual understanding. In interacting with the hierarchical structures that stood in the way of all interested stakeholders from participating in this PAR project, I came to understand at a visceral and emotive level the workings of this system. This kind of understanding brought to life the abstract conceptual knowledge about power relations. For instance, it increased my consciousness of the power that university structures had with their authority to shape the direction of this dissertation. It provided me with the opportunity to explore the role that power asymmetries played in this research study as I addressed my relationship to the IRB. It was important for me to be reflexive about sources of inequity and gain insight in to the mechanisms of power.

Addressing Power Asymmetries

This section is an exploration of power asymmetries grounded in my own experience of PAR. I discovered many ways of understanding alternatives to conceptualizing power and experienced changes in knowledge that led to questioning my assumptions. As I attempted to critique power and voice, I discovered that there was already an established and accepted role of power in this context that invited resistance, feelings of powerlessness along with moments of insights, and questions that challenged the status quo. I explored the boundaries of prescribed ways of conducting research. I challenged, pushed and faced boundaries that have traditionally been set up by researchers and the

researched. This brought to light the power differentials in place along with the importance of understanding power relations and power structures in any given context. During these experiences, I encountered a range of power dynamics such as exclusion and constraints as well as empowerment and inclusion.

Power imbalances manifested several times during this project. I experienced these asymmetries, especially in “power over” relationships, which created barriers to understanding and impeded the process of change. Also, differing assumptions regarding power contributed to some of the constraints experienced in this PAR project. This did not just involve the lack of available channels for participatory dialogue. Even when such channels existed, communication failed due to fundamental differences in perception, expression, and power between different stakeholders. I came to recognize the occasions when conflicts would not be resolved and the need to accept the existing conflict.

I made meaning of my experiences by searching for alternative frameworks to comprehend power and ways it shapes everyday life and human experience. Although there were feelings of defensiveness, anger, frustration, powerlessness, and at times wondering if it was worth it, I desired to better understand myself, thus gaining a different perspective about the multifaceted aspects involved in hierarchical structures.

Although power asymmetries were experienced throughout this project, I attempted to change disempowering mechanisms through co-learning and inclusion of the co-researchers by means of a dialogic inquiry. I sought to rectify power imbalances by sharing the power inherent in this participatory approach

with them. I worked with them to unsettle and change some of the taken for granted aspects of power assumed by various stakeholders involved in this project, specifically with Collaborative Board members and Early Head Start staff.

As I reflected on the changes in my abilities as a PAR researcher, I realized I learned most through attempting to live the PAR principles I espoused during this project. I was challenged to build relationships, acknowledge and share power, encourage participation, and make change. As I continued to learn through cycles of action and reflection, my awareness was raised continually to new levels of consciousness regarding my own abilities. In trying to make a difference, I became different myself.

Practitioner/Researcher's Perspective on What Aspects of the Participatory Action Research Project Contributed to these Experiences

In this section, I explore my perceptions on what aspects of the PAR project contributed to my experiences. I suggest meaningful research occurred from the lived experiences of the co-researchers as well my own subjectivity. I entered the process as a full partner yet maintained awareness of my role as practitioner/researcher, representing an agency as well as a university. I applied a particular theoretical conceptualization that influenced my approach in facilitating the PAR process. It was my responsibilities to use my research skills to facilitate this process using key PAR principles such as reflexivity, sharing power, giving voice, facilitating consciousness raising, and developing tools to work toward change. All of these encouraged participation and relationship

building. Despite barriers we encountered, this did not impede the potential for a meaningful learning opportunity. Equity and transparency were two aspects of PAR that I believe contributed to my experiences during the project. Both appeared to be core to our work and necessary for authentic participation to bring about any change strategy.

Attention to Equity

I carried out this study by bringing a critical perspective on social justice. Equity is an ethical concept of social justice, fairness, and human rights where need rather than privilege is the foundation for the allocation of resources. The heart of social justice issues regarding power and voice gave meaning to this PAR project. My responsibility as a practitioner/researcher involved facilitating a process to raise consciousness and change the balance of power. Inequities were made visible through underrepresentation, lack of resources and encounters with hierarchies, policies and practices. Attempts to counter these emerged in the stories of our experiences. A social justice focus sensitized me to look at these experiences and the larger social structures in new ways to increase my understandings of how these structures work.

Equity was illuminated in the relationships between the co-researchers and me. We carried out the PAR project as a joint effort with a commitment to change practices. We built equitable partnerships and collaborations within our research group as well as with Collaborative Board members. The co-researchers were recognized as experts in knowing their own realities and empowered to make changes in their everyday circumstances. The labels they

brought with them that minimized their experiences were discarded as they were identified as co-researchers of the PAR project.

The co-researchers had varied and participative involvement in decision-making. Their views, perspectives, and concerns were heard and valued as their voices were made apparent. My role was to assist them in building capacity to contribute to the process of knowledge generation and develop meaningful strategies for action. I focused my attention on specific tasks to establish a participatory environment and sustain its integrity throughout the PAR project.

Empowered participatory processes require relative equity of power between researcher and co-researcher, and imply voice and agency, a feeling of power and effectiveness, with real opportunities to have a say. I worked to prevent marginalization by attending to the emergence of equity and invited the co-researchers to partake in new terrains of responsibility. I left room for them to contribute their resources to designing the PAR project, implementing it and reflecting on their actions. In doing so, the PAR project revealed equity in many of the co-researchers experiences and relationships while also creating optimal conditions for learning and empowerment.

Transparency

I entered the PAR project with transparency and clarity about my positions and expectations to the co-researchers and IRB. My role in the PAR project was not neutral; I was committed to and advocated particular values based on my best judgment about fairness and justice. I realized the impact of my positions on the research process. I identified myself as the Executive Director of

Community Services of Venango County, sharing their desire to improve the Early Head Start program of this agency. I also identified my status as doctoral student and the importance of facilitating this study and writing a dissertation to receive a Ph.D. I made a conscious effort to keep my location, agenda, and values visible, and periodically reflected on how they affected the course of the project. My own assumptions about voice and power informed my thinking and had a profound influence on how I conducted and participated in this research. I worked at being transparent and attentive to the methodological and epistemological influences, contradictions, and complexities in all stages of the PAR process. I explicitly connected my judgment to discussions in current literature. I attended to these throughout the PAR project, and was aware of their influence the direction of this work.

As I practiced collaboratively with the co-researchers, I did not seek to hide my values, strengths, weaknesses, or uncertainties from them. I was aware of my individual struggles and gained insight into various emotions, such as self-doubt, that emerged during the PAR project. I acknowledged my own limitations, such as when I could not gain permission from the IRB to allow the Early Head Start staff to participate in the study.

While I provided a measure of expertise in conducting the research, the co-researchers retained direction of the research process itself. They had full and complete disclosure regarding how the study was being conducted and had access to the data collected. They had awareness of the struggles and difficulties that were a constant part of the process. The transparent and

participatory processes developed over time assisted us in ameliorating these tensions and gave us strength to continue our work during ambiguous periods.

One of my contributions was my constant engagement in the PAR process and my ability to navigate obstacles as they unfolded. While my role involved providing opportunities for collective growth, I needed to maintain a continual openness to let go of that which was not embraced by all. I maintained awareness of the choices available to us during the PAR process. I worked to make them clear and transparent to myself and to the co-researchers on a regular basis for mutual scrutiny. My choices emerged from both personal and professional commitments to the values of PAR. However, I needed to ensure that the choices fit their realities and built their capacities to enrich and enhance the directions they chose to pursue.

We explored our understandings and experiences of the process which is an action directly related to transparency. We worked to develop a culture of transparency and kept our focus on our purposes for conducting the PAR project. We asked questions of each other such as: What are we pursuing and is it appropriate and have relevance to what we are doing? What issues deserve our attention? What is important in this situation? How well are we doing, how can we show others how well we've done? This participative exploration allowed more intimate conversation, led to greater empowerment of the co-researchers, to greater openness and the ability to think through and practice their own self-determined actions.

I communicated my expectations as honestly and authentically as I could, while maintaining a commitment to participation, empowerment, and democracy. It was important for me to take seriously the responsibility to understand the perspectives and concerns of the co-researchers, collectively, and individually. The processes developed ensured opportunities for effective inquiry among us which emerged over time as we learned new skills of inquiry. Our understanding of the issues deepened as our PAR process grew and shifted over time.

Summary

It was my intent to illustrate through this study that a PAR approach could enable the co-researchers to discover their voice, and in the process identify what was most meaningful to them in the Early Head Start program. This research suggests that PAR holds potential for increasing voice through developing and enhancing local capacity to implement solutions to issues they identified.

The PAR project's primary aim was to create a shared communicative space where all involved could think, talk, and act together openly. However, we experienced a change in the conceptualization of the PAR project right from the beginning. While I envisioned the study as engaging all significant stakeholders in the development of a measurement tool for Early Head Start, constraints levied by the IRB prevented the Early Head Start staff from participating in the study. As discussed in this chapter, our values varied rather strongly regarding who should be involved in the process of the study. While I owned my values, I recognized that in order to receive a doctorate from this university I needed to

follow their protocol. I saw this choice as balancing my ideology with the reality of the particular context in which I was involved. This choice is discussed in the PAR literature which suggests that such consciousness does not always lead to changing behavior and people may consent to the power of the existing social order even if they think it is unjust (Eyben, Harris, & Pettit, 2006).

Throughout this chapter, I examined the PAR process through which the co-researchers played a central role in maintaining and sustaining our research efforts, the nature of the knowledge generated and the action and reflection embedded in PAR. The findings demonstrate that the co-researchers created a process in which they became involved in leading the research rather than being the subjects of research.

The co-researchers performed a number of different functions and roles. They were involved in providing direction for the PAR project which enabled them to define their issues, find solutions, take action, and reflect on the process and outcomes. They experienced a wide array of trainings, activities, and dialogue where they expressed important values and beliefs. This PAR project affirms the inherent value of PAR in working with the Early Head Start mothers and empowering them in the process. It demonstrates an approach that goes beyond tokenism to directly determine, interpret, and address their needs, their perspectives and aspirations. They shared significant insights on substantial issues encountered throughout the PAR project. These findings indicate that the co-researchers found an alternative, more inclusive avenue to explore ideas and possibilities for change.

In analyzing the transcripts, I faced the inevitable challenge of deciding how to represent prudently and clearly, the data collected. I relied heavily on the co-researcher's own voice as I attempted to present the narratives that best characterized the essence of their being through dialogue that best captured their thoughts and experiences. While I am confident that I accomplished this, I am also aware that other data could have been the focus.

I also facilitated research choices and structured group processes. These findings represent my own analysis and thinking through the choices I made to keep some elements and exclude others. I exercised power in the conceptual framing and presentation. These were affected by my values and experiences as well as forces external to this context.

This study was a small scale PAR project with four young women as co-researchers and our involvement over time deepened our understanding of the questions that guided this study. The findings illustrate the benefits and challenges of engaging in PAR and can hopefully help others to better plan and engage in projects with the communities they are working in.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In this chapter I present the results and conclusions drawn from the study and discuss the findings in relation to the relevant literature described in Chapter Two, along with their implications for the theory and practice of PAR. In this dissertation, I analyzed how this research approach influenced local constituents' voice in contributing to the PAR project. Specifically, I return to my original research questions which looked at how the process of PAR impacted local voice:

1. To what extent and what ways do the principles of PAR contribute to impacting the strength of local voice in relevant dialogue during the development of this project?
2. How do those who participate in the PAR project perceive that their voice has made a contribution?
3. Explore and examine the interconnections and tensions that emerged between PAR and IRB as experienced by the practitioner/researcher through this dissertation.

I begin by summarizing the findings of the project as they relate to these questions. I discuss how this research suggests that the principles of PAR, as implemented in this project, contributed to strengthening the voices of co-researchers during this process. The PAR principles also contributed to strategies created by the Early Head Start mothers to engage in experiences that

led to action during the PAR project. The impact of the PAR process became visible as the co-researchers expressed and demonstrated sustained ownership of the PAR project. I also summarize the influence of differing frameworks of power and voice on the PAR process.

In the discussion section, I synthesize the findings of my research with the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter Two. I discuss Habermas's communicative action and theory of systems world and lifeworld as they relate to this dissertation. I also highlight human flourishing and hope. The third section focuses on the implications of PAR for evaluation of human service programs, emphasizing PAR as an alternative approach that creates circumstances in which all involved in and affected by services have a right to be heard in the formation of program actions.

Fourth, I explore the limitations surrounding the ethical differences that emerged between the IRB and PAR legitimacy issues. I highlight the tensions with the goal of making the PAR process and its challenges more transparent. I conclude with recommendations for future research along with some final reflections.

Summarized Findings

The findings that emerged in this study were congruent with, and supported by, the literature review discussed in Chapter Two. The findings suggest that: (1) contributions of PAR principles supported ownership of the PAR project by the co-researchers; (2) critical reflection increased voice and inclusion; and, (3) differing frameworks of power and voice from multiple

stakeholders influenced the PAR project. The discussion that follows summarizes each of these findings.

Impact of Participatory Action Research Principles for Co-Researchers

PAR principles maintain that people have a right to participate and express their own values in the research design. In this study, the co-researchers were involved in a collaborative approach that assumes they are experts on the context of the research and are able to contribute valuable information for the project. They came together in order to construct new meaning related to their questions through cycles of learning, action and reflection. According to Freire (1970):

The starting point . . . must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people We must pose this . . . to the people as a problem which challenges them and requires a response-not just at an intellectual level, but at a level of action. (p. 75)

Through the influence of PAR principles, the co-researchers conducted a research study that gave them the capacity to exercise judgment and take risks.

Developing and Sustaining Ownership for the Participatory Action Research Project

At the onset, a small group of Early Head Start mothers initiated this PAR project, envisioning it as a tool to improve the quality of services provided. As the project began, the co-researchers experienced limited power and voice and could not engage others in the community to participate as originally planned. However, the actual research process evolved into something quite different as

originally planned due to two distinct but interrelated features. One, the IRB controlled who participated in the study. Because this research was based within a university setting, it needed to be accountable to specific requirements set by the IRB. The second feature is attributed to the emergent nature of PAR itself in that it evolved over time as the co-researchers developed their PAR project.

The data also suggests that engagement in this project itself provided an opportunity for increasing power by changing some of the thinking that maintained powerlessness. Through the PAR project, the co-researchers secured access to additional resources. Gaining new knowledge through multiple sources enhanced the legitimacy of the research process. These factors increased their perception of their own power, as they moved toward a sharing of power that appeared to be consistent with the PAR philosophy. For instance, by inviting Collaborative Board members to a meeting, the co-researchers exercised their power by initiating the communication. Prior to this meeting with them, the co-researchers perceived the Collaborative Board as discounting their local knowledge. Drawing on the sense of empowerment developed through accessing resources and conducting the study, they shifted from their posture of defensiveness with the Collaborative Board. They effectively engaged them in an on-going dialogue where they presented their position regarding ways to achieve better goals for the Early Head Start program. They successfully presented a coherent stance for their concerns and worked in partnership with the board about how to go about making some changes at Collaborative Board

meetings. Thus they succeeded by increasing local voice in agenda setting and decision-making with Collaborative Board members.

The PAR project proved to be a vehicle for strengthening, organizing, and articulating voice in relevant dialogue regarding the Early Head Start program. The change in relationships between Collaborative Board members and the co-researchers provides evidence of shifts in power, effecting change in Collaborative Board policies. The PAR project demonstrates that the research process created local ownership, promoted and enhanced the capacity for new knowledge and empowered the co-researchers to build alliances which had the potential to expand their power at the local level. It also resulted in a sense of agency as the co-researchers effectively asserted themselves and took advantage of opportunities that enhanced their perception of their own power. This occurred because they were involved in multiple aspects of the PAR process. They took initiative, organized events, and performed other tasks needed for the success of the project.

Ownership of the project occurred as the co-researchers felt they had an equal share in the power base. Authority, control, and responsibility were spread across the co-researchers. Most of the practical applications of the research framework were directed by them. This authority established their ownership of the project and ensured their voices were heard.

Different Eyes: Critical Reflection Increases Voice and Engagement

The PAR principles provided the framework for ongoing, critical reflection by the co-researchers. According to Gaventa and Cornwall (2008), "PAR sees

research as a process of reflection, learning and development of critical consciousness” (p. 181). The PAR project was designed to provide opportunities for the Early Head Start mothers to engage in critical dialogue about the power and meaning of voice, thus leading to the development of critical consciousness. They created genuinely inclusive, safe space for self-critical investigation and analysis of their own reality.

In this study the co-researchers shared their experiences and understandings. They discovered that they shared many similar issues. The data indicates that their discussions not only disclosed complex ways in which they identified themselves, but also how they experienced ongoing marginality by the larger society. Their concerns were central to this PAR project and revealed the pervasiveness of dominant societal beliefs embedded in their everyday lives. The early conversations that took place in our group discussions indicated that initially the co-researchers had very little, if any, opportunity to talk openly with others about being portrayed in a negative light or about the barriers present due to prevailing middle class values and attitudes. Rather, they learned to accept the responsibility of living in poverty as a personal failure.

However, over time, the co-researchers were willing to open the door to reconceptualizing the complexities of their situation, expressing the desire to better understand, thus gaining different perspectives about the multifaceted world we live in. They shifted and created new identities for themselves despite the seemingly hegemonic power and dominant discourses and governmental practices (Gibson, 2001).

The role of critical dialogue enabled them to empower themselves through the construction of their own knowledge, in a process of action and reflection, or conscientisation, to use Freire's term. For Freire, this learning process is aimed at transforming the individual/collective consciousness by providing a context for people to become active participants in creating their own knowledge and critically examining their realities. Freire (1997) "affirms men and women are beings in the process of becoming—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality" (p. 82).

This dialogic setting is not a manipulative strategy, but a construct that allows for open exchange, as well as silence and reflection. The co-researchers were able to develop new awareness of their reality and to act for themselves. They shared new insights, priorities, and definitions of problems and issues to be addressed in the change process. The Early Head Start mothers tapped into their own resources and became creators of their own voice through a process that required a commitment to educating themselves about PAR principles and power of voice. Their voices became more audible by facilitating their empowerment through "ordinary talk" (Maguire, 2004). The co-researchers were encouraged to use their own language and hear their own voices in understanding what was happening to them and around them. Freire strongly believed in the power of critical communicative action to reveal to people the conditions of their own existence and their ability to change their circumstances. Thus, he saw voice as a central feature of liberation. Freire (1970) noted that

“human beings are not built in silence” (p. 88) and that reclaiming the right to speak was one of the most powerful forms of action (Greenwood & Levin, 2007).

While the Early Head Start mothers may have felt less powerful in some spaces of their lives, their access to a reflective space contributed to feeling more powerful and involved. They collectively worked through and made sense of personal and shared experiences. Not only is telling one’s story crucial, but it’s also about being heard. According to Freire (1997), “it is in speaking . . . that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings” (p. 69).

By the end of our time together, the co-researchers had reached the point of re-thinking some of the negative stereotypes that they encountered. They touched upon those emotions and this was a difficult and sometimes painful process. A consideration of the emotional engagement in doing research, of what it feels like to do research and to be intimately involved, represents a feminist, post-positivist flipside to the distanced mantle of the scientific method (Cahill, 2004).

But in order for this negativity not to consume them, hooks (1995) argues that it must be engaged and used constructively; and it is this engagement that leads toward personal and social transformation. The research process enabled the co-researchers to develop a relationship with one another that permitted them to support each other in exploring their views within their own framework for understanding the world. This process opened communicative space where one did not exist and gave them voice. The collective critical reflection process

of PAR provided a space for expressing and releasing emotions and working through the pain and confusion of personal and shared experiences. The reflective space of the project suggests the possibilities of PAR as a collective space for breaking the silence. PAR projects can open space for communication and dialogue, creating space for muted and silenced voices (McArdle, 2002) or where there were no forums for democratic dialogue (Gustavensen, 2001). It provided a process of working together, of collaborating in producing different understandings. As Joan expressed: “Our research resulted in a shared bond between all of us.” The support and the relationships developed through the PAR process were what the co-researchers articulated as the most important aspect of the project. The PAR project functioned as a place where the young women could reflect, experiment, and grapple with different perspectives and in doing so, work through contradictions of their everyday lives.

This critical reflective space of PAR suggests that it contributed to increased voice and engagement, leading to the co-researchers reaching out and across spaces to new relationships. They made many concrete recommendations for change in the Early Head Start program. As the co-researchers reflected on the many hours and accomplishments during their time with the project, Sara shared: “I don’t feel like I’m lazy or uneducated any more.” The PAR project provided a place for the co-researchers to take control of these negative representations, acknowledging them and taking their power away.

Influence of Alternative Frameworks of Power and Voice on the Participatory Action Research Project

Power can be conceptualized in many different ways giving rise to different sets of debate (Moser, 2005). If we accept that power is multidimensional, defined by various forms of agency and socialization, then the learning process should enable us to access, explore and understand as many of these as possible (Pettit, 2006).

Many critiques of power focus on the repressive side of power, and conceptualize power as a resource that individuals gain, hold, and yield (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001). However, these frameworks have been critiqued from a number of differing perspectives that have expanded to alternative frameworks for understanding power. This study also engaged alternative views that added new voices to this ongoing debate as a result of exposure to different experiences with power.

Hayward's (1998) alternative view recognizes that power is part of all social relationships relations and occurs at every level and sphere, affecting the powerful as well as the powerless. This broader approach to power includes the more positive aspects through which power enables action as well as how it delimits it. This view of power enabled the co-researchers to work collaboratively with others which broaden their boundaries of possibilities. Specifically, their access to knowledge was a significant resource that increased opportunities for them. Through the process of knowledge production, they gained the capacity to

take action in area's that affected their lives enabling them to exercise greater voice and agency.

By using alternative frameworks of understanding knowledge as power and a resource, freedom then “is the capacity to participate effectively in shaping the social limits that define what is possible” (Hayward, 1998, p.12). In this sense, participation as freedom is not only a right to participate effectively in a given space, but the right to define and to shape that space (Gaventa, 2006). The co-researchers were successful in shaping the boundaries of participatory spaces they created, made decisions based on their common interests, and made efforts to widen their spaces by inviting other interested stakeholders to the table. These were empowering strategies that shaped and increased the visibility and legitimacy of their voice. Through PAR spaces they learned at times what it takes to participate effectively in challenging and reframing embedded power inequities.

The feminist understanding of power also provided a strong influence on this PAR project. Feminism raises issues of voice and silence. It uses everyday experience as a source of knowledge, challenges power, and understands that knowledge is always created in the context of human relations. Feminist views have deepened our understanding of power and relationships; it refuses to deal with power in cognitive terms only. The co-researchers relationships were enhanced as they engaged in deeper levels of dialogue which contributed to knowing each other at an affective level. Their support of one another was fostered in an environment of respect, caring, sincerity, authenticity, and trust.

In the feminist framework to understanding power, dialogue is the key element in an emancipatory strategy that liberates. Feminist inspired research challenges us to consider how we create spaces for all voices to be heard, as well as how we use our voices to unsettle power differentials whenever encountered (Maguire, 2002). For PAR, voice relates directly to power, with some equating action research with “the right to speak” (Hall, 2001). Thus, the co-researchers came to realize they did not have to remain silent, and that they could use their voices to challenge the inequities of power which affected their lives and potentially disrupt the status quo. They expressed to varying degrees, dissatisfaction with status quo in terms of existing social and economic conditions.

They re-conceptualized their position of powerlessness and developed the capacity for power within and power with. They focused on the productive aspects of power--the ability to empower, to establish critical democracy and engage in rethinking their worldviews. PAR research was a means of closing the gap, of remedying the power inequities through processes of knowledge generation which strengthened voice, organization, and action (Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991).

However, while more alternative ways to address power imbalances continues to grow, a strong structural or systemic phenomenon remains, excluding people from participation in determining their actions or the conditions of their actions. Even in a process in which the co-generation of knowledge is

the explicit goal, differences of power, and privilege maintain a hold on all human interactions (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, & Maguire, 2003).

The PAR experience for the Early Head Start mothers demonstrates the complexities of power dynamics. Acknowledging arenas of struggle was helpful for the co-researchers in understanding the tensions generated by unequal power differentials. As they developed their capacities to participate effectively, they found ways to move forward with a sense of empowerment, took action, and did not become paralyzed while struggling with important questions (Brydon-Miller, 2004).

Discussion of Findings

Relationship Between Findings and Theoretical Framework

Aligned with the critical theory paradigm (Kemmis, 2001), PAR pays particular attention to relations of power, often with an explicit agenda for altering power imbalance. While there are several components of this PAR dissertation that are connected to aspects of the view of critical theory associated with the Frankfurt School, in this section I will primarily concentrate on its alignment with the writings of Habermas. In this section I discuss ways in which his theory relates to the findings of this dissertation. I specifically focus on his theories of communicative action, systems, and lifeworld. These theories can inform an understanding of complex social change situations. I contend that Habermas' philosophy provides a useful frame for considering this PAR project.

Communicative Action

In *Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas (1984) described communicative action as action oriented toward intersubjective agreement, mutual understanding, and unforced consensus about what to do. It is the kind of communication that occurs when people turn aside from getting things done to ask what are we doing (Kemmis, 2008).

In *Between Facts and Norms*, Habermas (1996) noticed that communicative action opened communicative spaces between people. The co-researchers in this PAR project demonstrated the ability to open a communicative space that was previously unavailable to them. The re-negotiated ways to establish partnerships with a diverse group of Collaborative Board members and participated in a decision-making process with them. According to Kemmis (2001):

The first step in action research turns out to be central: the formation of a communicative space . . . and to create this space in a way that will permit people to achieve mutual understanding and consensus about what to do, in the knowledge that the legitimacy of any conclusions and decisions reached by participants will be proportional to the degree of authentic engagement of those concerned. (p. 200)

Reason (2004) has argued that this formation of communicative space is in itself a form of action:

It may well be that the most important thing we can do in certain situations is to open, develop, maintain, and encourage new and better forms of communication and dialogue. (p. 20)

Habermas believed that communicative action has the potential to build solidarity between people who become open with one another, leading to legitimacy of their decisions. His argument is that legitimacy is guaranteed only through communicative action, that is, when people are free to choose and decide--authentically for themselves, individually and in the context of mutual participation (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005).

In the PAR project, the co-researchers made decisions regarding their priorities for the PAR project, articulated concerns and took actions to make changes. In this specific situation, their joint interest in Early Head Start assisted with building alliances within a broader arena, specifically Focus On Our Future Collaborative Board. Habermas viewed this type of communicative action as significant when we interrupt what we are doing to explore its nature, dynamics, and worth (Kemmis, 2001). The co-researchers and Collaborative Board members reached a shared understanding, legitimizing their common goals that embraced the values connected to the Early Head Start program.

Theory of System and Lifeworld

The theory of communicative action includes a substantive theory (the theory of system of lifeworld). This offers a new way of construing problems that occur for participants when the personal, social, and cultural processes that sustain the setting as a lifeworld collides with processes which characterize the

setting as a system (Kemmis, 2001). The theory of system and lifeworld offers a way of understanding participant's perspectives as structured by the contrasting and sometimes competing imperatives of social systems and the lifeworld participants inhabit.

Habermas describes lifeworld as inherently familiar and knowable. Communication and collaboration to reach shared understandings of complex and diverse social situations contribute to the creation of socio-cultural understandings within the lifeworld. However, as the interactions within society become more sophisticated, formal structures are established that are not based on the social interactions of lifeworld actors. Habermas (1987) suggests that as features of the systems world become increasingly complex, the system world uncouples or separates from the lifeworld. To be effective as a systems entity, however, the systems world must be embedded in the values, beliefs, and understandings of the lifeworld (Kemmis, 2002).

Implications for Participatory Action Research and Institutional Review Board

The overall task of critical theory using a PAR approach is to explore and address the interconnections and tensions between system and lifeworld aspects of a setting as they lived out in practice (Park, 2002). Habermas' theory of system and lifeworld provides a framework to explore the tensions between my role as a PAR doctoral student and the externally imposed systems world of the IRB.

In this PAR study, the IRB and the Focus On Our Future Collaborative Board are both examples of formal structures with features of the system world. However, the co-researchers were able to find a way to genuinely engage with the Collaborative Board members; this did not occur with my interactions with the IRB.

As noted throughout this study, the IRB and I held diverse perspectives on research practice itself. Structural differentiations between the qualities and components of the lifeworld of PAR and the systems world of the IRB as experienced in the context of this dissertation are illustrated as follows:

| <u>The Lifeworld</u> | <u>The Systems World</u> |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| PAR doctoral student | IRB |
| Personal | Imposed |
| Internal | External |
| Intersubjective | Objective |
| Moral reasoning | Obedience/compliance |
| Collaboration/cooperation | Competition |
| Shared understandings | Social norms |
| Power with | Power over |

The differentiation between the qualities of the two systems became increasingly difficult to manage. The complexities of the system world became fragmented and the lifeworld of PAR could not find ways to successfully maneuver through it.

Habermas goes further to explain that the system world acts as a formal and objective requirement rather than an intersubjective, dialogic part of the

lifeworld. The systems world requirements are translated through policy documents and procedural recommendations. This translation presents tensions in which the processes occur. Habermas (1987) believes that interactions between the two must overcome the structural differentiations described above. He insists that reaching a shared, consensual understanding of a situations is the ideal outcome for all stakeholders.

The differentiation between the systems world of the IRB and the lifeworld of PAR stakeholders created conflicts. The system world requirements of the IRB were deeply embedded and resulted in a distant stance from PAR and an increased reliance on policies and procedures. Both were incompatible and as a result, tensions occurred. Obedience to the requirements of the IRB are based on broad social norms rather than collaborated shared understandings such as those identified in the lifeworld chart of PAR identified earlier in this section.

The lifeworld of the PAR project consisted of several interactions and experiences between many stakeholders with the expectation of everyone's involvement in the context of the project. The co-researchers were empowered as they shared and discussed understandings relevant to the PAR project. Efforts were made to reduce the barriers to collaboration and communicative action. In the process, the Collaborative Board became aware of their concerns regarding the Early Head Start program and expanded their understanding of the situation.

However, in regards to the IRB, the tensions created were not resolved but created barriers to stakeholder inclusion. Their systems world impinged on

the way they made decisions regarding the PAR project. To achieve their requirements, certain protocols were required. The fundamental processes of communicative action were not stated as a priority within their regulations. Decisions were based on compliance rather than a collaborative understanding of the issues before us.

The Habermasian notion of systems and lifeworld theory expands the understanding of the settings in which we work from both perspectives. It gives us richer, critical insight into how processes of social formation and transformation can occur in the context of a PAR project.

Summary

In summary, this section applied Habermas' theory of lifeworld and systems world to expose the tensions experienced in this PAR study. The theory of communicative action in relation to lifeworld theory emphasized the importance of the process of collaboration as it relates to reaching shared understandings about issues within a communicative space. This process is important when shared understandings contribute to generating knowledge that can be accessible to assist with resolving dilemmas such as those that arose in this study. It is suggested that the intersubjectivity of the lifeworld provided a valuable resource base which assisted in resolving issues with the Collaborative Board.

The systems world in this study also includes the IRB which is described as distinct from the lifeworld of PAR project. The IRB world lacked the participatory and collaborative nature of the PAR. It relied on compliance from

the doctoral student and this caused tensions that remained unresolved throughout the PAR project. I was unable to open dialogue within this system to discuss the nature of the problems experienced and possible changes that could redefine established practices.

Human Flourishing and Hope

During the PAR project, the co-researchers and myself developed enduring relationships along with individual skills, capacities, critical awareness and voice. As the PAR project developed, the co-researchers demonstrated flexibility and the ability to reevaluate the process along the way. They remained in the study despite several conflicts that emerged. They addressed barriers as temporary obstacles that became vehicles to create new learning and strengthened partnerships. This section extracts lessons learned about human flourishing and hope from this PAR project.

The co-researchers engaged in cycles of action and reflection throughout the study. In addition to their own busy lives, they were dedicated to their weekly meetings as well as other responsibilities of the PAR project that emerged over time. This was an emancipatory and transformative process for the co-researchers and myself as we created collaborative relationships, negotiated power, and engaged in critical dialogue.

Human flourishing reconnects individuals to communities in order to make a difference by transforming the well-being of the community. Reason and Bradbury (2001) define action research as a participatory, democratic process

concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview. They state:

It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities. (p. 1)

Ideally, they believe such endeavors should be linked with a broader vision of human functioning, one that can act as a source of continuous reflection and enrichment.

Heron and Reason (2001) state, “our worldview encompasses our total sense of who we are, what the world is and how we know it. It encompasses our sense of what is worthwhile and important” (p. 4). Being involved in PAR had many benefits as the co-researchers experienced growth and learning, resulting in human flourishing. The PAR process was rooted in values that built human capacity by seeking connectedness, finding meaning through relationships, and affirming the right to have a voice. They honored and utilized each others contributions to create legitimate opportunities for action. They conveyed the importance of being in relationships. Trust developed through their commitment to the study. They recognized that, despite their differences, each had unique and valuable knowledge, perspectives, and experiences to contribute to the PAR project.

The co-researchers had opportunities to enact their power and capacity, and made choices about actions that mattered. Their ongoing commitment and

participation was sustained through ongoing dialogue. They listened to one another and asked critical questions when problems arose that required deeper reflection. According to Rorty (1989) “All discussion between human beings, one way or another, is about what’s worthwhile. It’s about what are we going to do next!” (p.114).

A wider purpose of PAR is to contribute through practical knowledge to the increased well-being of human persons and communities. Reason (1998) writes that participation is a political imperative because it affirms the fundamental human right of persons to contribute to decisions that affect them:

Human persons are centres of consciousness within the cosmos, agents with emerging capacities for self-awareness and self-direction. Human persons are also communal beings, born deeply immersed into community and evolving within community . . . we are not human without community. Participation is thus fundamental to human flourishing, and is political because, especially in these times, it requires the exercise of intentional human agency, political action in public and private spheres, to encourage and nurture its development. (p. 147)

The participative exploration allowed more intimate conversation, led to greater empowerment of the co-researchers, to more openness and the ability to think through and practice their own self-determined strategies and to different solutions that were not originally apparent. This speaks to the emergent process of PAR in that it evolved over time as the co-researchers developed their PAR

project, with worthwhile purposes, through many ways of knowing in participative and democratic relationships (Reason & Bradbury, 2001).

Fals Borda (2001) embraced PAR as “vivencia,” meaningful life experiences, intimately tied to the particular context, place, time, and life history of each person. He described PAR as a “vivencia, necessary for the achievement of progress and democracy; a complex of attitudes and values that would give meaning to our praxis in the field” (Fals Borda, 2001, p. 31). It also leads us to develop an empathetic attitude in our relationships with others. It directs our attention to questions that are worthwhile, what values and purpose are worthy of pursuit in improving local conditions and in people’s self-reliance and empowerment.

A noticeable outcome of the PAR project was that meaningful integration of perspectives and life experiences offered opportunities and possibilities. Hooks (1994) states: “we have the opportunity . . . to demand of ourselves and our comrades an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress” (p. 207).

Given the conditions of our times, a primary purpose of human inquiry is not so much to search for truth but to heal and instill hope. The co-researchers believed in the dignity of people and they were optimistic that the work they were doing could instill hope for the future of the Early Head Start program and the people it serves. Rorty (1999) states, “hope, the ability to believe that the future will be unspecifically different from, and unspecifically freer than, the past, is the

condition of growth” (p. 120). Reason (2003) acknowledged that there is a strong link between hope and PAR, which can be seen as a way of articulating and practicing new ways of living together fruitfully. Over time the Early Head Start mothers recognized their own knowledge, realized they could help one another, and believed that together they could take action to improve their lives even though tensions, power struggles and conflict existed. The co-researchers endeavors revealed opportunities for hope, the capacity to bring about change and the possibility that things could be different in the future.

Implications of Participatory Action Research for Evaluation of Human Service Programs

The experience of this project has relevance for evaluation of human service practices. The dominant approach in this field has used experts to control policy formation, decision making about research, and program evaluation while excluding meaningful participation and democratic dialogue from those who use their services. Evaluation has typically served government and funding agencies and is linked to institutional contexts of power. However, as presented in Chapter Two, evidence continues to mount showing that these responses have limited success in diminishing the multitude of growing social problems. Alternative evaluation approaches seek to change the dominant model by helping ordinary people gain the knowledge and voice to address an evaluation's purpose, judge a program's quality, and enacts changes based on their learning.

The literature suggests that human service agencies are increasingly recognizing the value of PAR approaches to evaluation and are moving toward support of efforts to generate models of practice. Today, these approaches are now being conducted in every type of public, nonprofit, and private organization, not only to determine program's merit, value, or worth, but also to improve programs, processes, products, systems, policies, and the organization's performance (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006).

In recent years there have also been calls for increasing stakeholder voice to help nonprofits become stronger, more sustainable, and better able to serve their communities. These practices are also encouraged by philanthropic foundations as seen by the number of recent public and private national initiatives investing in PAR approaches. For instance, in the past 15 years the W. K. Kellogg Foundation has supported community based participatory research as an approach to improving health status and eliminating health disparities. The Foundation requires an approach to research that equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings. Their expectations include a research topic of importance to the community which has the aim of combining knowledge with action along with achieving social change to improve health outcomes and eliminate health disparities (W. K. Foundation Community Health Scholars Program, 2006). This foundation promotes the values of participation, redistribution of power, and collective intelligence.

PAR is an approach to evaluation that goes beyond traditional methods of evaluation. This approach has the potential to be more enriched, effective, and valued; and most importantly, it will be more relevant to today's ever-changing and interconnected organizational and social issues (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006). PAR offers an alternative focus on evaluation that ultimately has the potential for human service staff and program participants to grow together through asking questions, reflection, and dialogue.

Based on the experience of this project, I offer some recommendations to improve evaluations for human service programs. I suggest that collaborative, democratic empowering approaches to evaluation can be realized through inclusion of many diverse stakeholder voices in asking critical questions about the services they receive. PAR provides a viable approach for strengthening alternative evaluation processes in this specific context.

Inclusion of Diverse Stakeholders' Voices in Evaluation Processes

By the 1990s, evaluators grew increasingly interested in, and committed to using participatory, collaborative, democratic, empowerment, and learning-oriented approaches to evaluation. Many evaluators believe that the involvement of stakeholders can increase their understanding of evaluation and also increase their commitment to using the results (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006).

There continues to be some resistance to the value of stakeholder inclusion derived from the status associated with researcher expertise and an elitist attitude toward non researchers. However, I argue that this PAR project reframes the emphasis on generating expert judgments to an emphasis on

supporting the development of effective processes that engage and sustain multiple stakeholder voices. The distance between researcher and co-researcher is broken down; all participants are contributors working collectively. Initiating and sustaining dialogue among actors leads to a deep level of understanding and mutual respect (Gaventa, 1993; Whitmore, 1994).

After years of working with stakeholders, some evaluators began to study what and how stakeholders were learning from their participation (Cousins, 1999; Patton, 1997; Preskill & Torres, 1999; Preskill, Zuckerman, & Matthews, 2003). They discuss the importance of creating learning spaces and the opportunity for dialogue and reflection. This PAR project demonstrates conditions were created that enhanced the co-researchers capacity to engage thoughtfully in participatory, collaborative, democratic processes. They found meaning through relationships and developed a deeper understanding of the process as a result of shared learning experiences and collective action.

Despite the many challenges that can occur, PAR has the potential to have a positive experience where benefits to multiple participants are maximized and risks minimized. It requires different skills in the research approach that may not be commonly needed in traditional forms of research (Grant, Nelson, & Mitchell, 2007). This PAR project ensured that the co-researchers gained a sense of mastery in several aspects of participatory evaluation as well as gaining self-worth and confidence.

Participatory Action Research: A Viable Approach to Strengthening Alternative Evaluation Processes

Much has been written on the evolution of the multidimensional concept of evaluation use, most recently the examination of consequences of evaluation that are not a function of evaluation findings or recommendations, but rather on the process of evaluation in its own right (Alkin & Taut, 2003; Cousins, Goh, Clark, & Lee, 2004; Preskill, Zuckerman & Matthews, 2003). Patton (1997) was the first to define process use as the impacts that result from the learning occurring as a consequence of involvement in the evaluation process. In addition, the effects of involvement in applied, systematic inquiry have been mentioned in the literature on PAR and other forms of collaborative inquiry (Levin, 1993). As demonstrated through this project, PAR offers a number of methods for integrating collaborative, participatory, and democratic processes to the evaluation field. Specifically, the co-researchers experience exemplifies these processes as they shared significant insights on substantial issues encountered throughout the PAR project.

PAR also supports several principles identified by evaluation researchers. These include: (a) evaluation theory and practice should reflect a society that advances democracy; (b) in an evaluation context, there should be a redistribution of power relationships accomplished by “democratizing knowledge” and acknowledging the value of different types of knowing; and, (c) evaluation should create a space for communication about critical issues among stakeholder groups (Cousins & Earl, 1992; Fetterman; 2000; Greene, 2000;

House & Howe, 1992; Patton, 1997; Preskill & Torres, 1999). These principles were consciously used during the project to support the development of a PAR process through critical dialogue and reflection. Several processes evolved that elicited multiple perspectives and raised questions for reflection that challenged the locus of power and control over the research issues.

The processes of participation and collaboration can also have an impact on participants beyond the findings they may produce by working together. Norman Uphoff (1991) published “A Field Guide for Participatory Self-Evaluation” aimed at grassroots community development projects. After reviewing a number of such studies, he concluded:

If the process of self-evaluation is carried out regularly and openly, with all group members participating, the answers they arrive at are in themselves not so important as what is learned from the discussion and from the process of reaching consensus on what questions should be used to evaluate group performance and capacity, and on what answers best describe their group’s present status. (p. 272)

This is demonstrated in the PAR project. For instance, in the process of participating in this PAR project to evaluate the Early Head Start program, the co-researchers were exposed to and had the opportunity to acquire many skills associated with inquiry skills and different ways of thinking. Because of their active involvement throughout the PAR project, they gained ownership of what they created and over time it became their process. This had the potential to have an impact on them beyond the PAR project.

House and Howe (2000) articulated three requirements for evaluation done in a way that supports democracy: inclusion, dialogue, and deliberation. They also express concern about the power that derives from the access to evaluation and the implications for society if only the powerful have such access:

We believe that the background conditions for evaluation should be explicitly democratic so that evaluation is tied to larger democratic principles argued, debated, and accepted by the evaluation community. Evaluation can be an institution that stands apart, reliable in the accuracy and integrity of its claims. But it needs a set of explicit democratic principles to guide its practices and test its intuitions (p. 4).

A number of other evaluators offer approaches that emphasize democratic principles and social justice in support of those whose stakes tend to be underrepresented in discussions because they are marginalized economically, socially, and politically (Patton, 2002). Participatory evaluation strategies have a lot in common with the complexity, diversity, and specificity of PAR approaches in general. One of the strengths of both PAR and participatory evaluation approaches is their commitment to and power in developing the capacity for self-evaluation among members. This PAR project highlights the ongoing participatory process that empowered the co-researchers to discover a sense of their capacities and expanded their sense of well-being.

In addition to creating a meaning making process, PAR supports the negotiation of power relations. Genuinely collaborative approaches to research and evaluation require power sharing which involves working with others (Patton,

2002). It provides a mechanism for identifying and working through power dynamics. In this project, the co-researchers challenged the traditional research dynamics as they kept control of the research in their hands. The development of interactions within a PAR process played a role in changing how the co-researchers viewed power in some situations. The concept of power was re-conceptualized through their own experiences.

The ability to share power is at the heart of PAR and demystifies the research process. The realities of power and voice were apparent throughout the PAR project and stimulated further dialogue among the co-researchers regarding their understanding of these issues. The co-researchers demonstrated the development of power sharing processes. They shifted the balance of power and control of the direction of the PAR project and decisions associated with it.

Limitations in the Practice of Participatory Action Research

The findings of this study are based on and thus limited to a PAR project located in Venango County, Pennsylvania and to the period of time during which the data were gathered from January through July, 2005. In qualitative research, the corollary of generalization is transferability. I have presented the findings of the PAR project so that others can determine for themselves the degree to which the findings of this study are transferable to other settings.

In this section I discuss two limitations of this study that I encountered as a university based doctoral student working with co-researchers in a community

setting. These limitations are ethical challenges with this type of research and PAR's struggle with legitimation in the university setting.

Ethical Challenges Between Institutional Review Board and Participatory Action Research

Complexity arose when ethical principles came into conflict between IRB and PAR. Ethical behavior is not the simple application of principles, but a social process of trying to achieve a balance among many different elements. The development of PAR reflects an ethical commitment to creating conditions for social change to be used by the community for their own purposes (Cahill, 2007). A critical approach of participatory action researchers is to conduct research as a basis for informing themselves and others about the problems or crises and to explore ways in which these might be overcome. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (2005):

Their stock in trade is communicative action both internally, by opening dialogue with the group of researchers-participants, and externally, by opening dialogue with the powers-that-be about the nature of the problems or crises that participants experience in their own lives and about ways of changing social structures and practices to overcome them. (p. 582)

The potential exists for advocates of PAR (myself included) to misstate the nature of this oppositional role--seeing themselves as opposed to established authorities rather than opposed to particular structures or established practices.

(Kemmis, 2008). As the doctoral student in this context, this has presented both a challenge and opportunity. The IRB itself is not a monolithic establishment, but in fact a collective of people whose interpretations and practices vary from institution to institution.

While I believe that the findings from this project can advance PAR approaches, challenges with ethical issues continue to persist and limit PAR. In the following section I discuss misunderstandings with ethics of inclusion and relationships.

Ethics of Inclusion and Relationships

The academic setting is often impersonal, and routinely hierarchical and bureaucratic. As an ethic of inclusion, PAR potentially represents a challenge to the dominant hierarchy's investment in maintaining and producing the normative production of knowledge. According to Torre and Fine (2006), "it represents a commitment to centering marginalized voices, to the understanding that people . . . hold deep knowledge about their lives and experiences, and should help shape the questions and frame the interpretations of research" (p. 458). PAR is a negotiated process developed between people who have agreed to work together to solve a particular issue. This is in contrast with the IRB model of ethics that is framed by abstract concepts of morality and assumes the consent process to be between strangers (Ellis, 2007). The current ethics standards do not take into account the question of costs and benefits to the communities, rather a more narrow focus on the cost and benefits to "subjects" (Sharp & Foster, 2002).

This PAR project involves a conscious and articulated positionality and ethical obligation to create opportunities for the production of new knowledge and the development of PAR theory. This speaks to the promises and potential of PAR in which primacy is placed on including people, as opposed to just not doing harm. According to Heron (1996):

To generate knowledge about persons without their full participation in deciding how to generate it is to misrepresent their personhood and to abuse by neglect their capacity for autonomous intentionality. It is fundamentally unethical. (p. 96)

The relational ethic of PAR work moves beyond the IRB's individualistic model of risks in its commitment to produce knowledge that is accountable to the people most affected by it. Our PAR project aimed to address the potential for voices to be heard. According to Cahhill and Fine (2007), "rather than 'doing no harm', PAR addresses the asymmetries of an unjust world and pushes us to rethink the role and impact of research beyond the journal article and the ivory tower (p. 87).

Negotiating ethical questions is key to the collaborative process with emphasis on inclusion and relationships. It is an ethical obligation to challenge what Friere (1996) identifies as the "inflexible negation of the right to dream differently, to dream of utopia" (p. 22). Or as James Baldwin (1961) put it, "the world is before you and you need not take it or leave it as it was when you came in" (p. 137). The IRB needs to re-conceptualize risk within the everyday social

and political context of our research to address ethical issues of representation, political strategy and emotional engagement.

Participatory Action Research: Struggles with Legitimation

There are significant challenges in spreading PAR in and through large bureaucracies with their hierarchies and tendencies to standardize, set targets and regulate. While recognizing that the IRB may not have intentionally created these conditions, the PAR project encountered significant resistance from them as they were unable to see the value of PAR as an approach to addressing critical social concerns. When principles are drawn from different worldviews, tensions cannot be fully resolved when no common ground is recognized; therefore reform becomes much more difficult. Higher education is organized around particular social relations of knowledge production (Gaventa, 1993; Rahman, 1991) that preserves the power of the academy to maintain control over knowledge production. History, culture and simple inertia favor maintaining an institutional structure that inhibits PAR.

Gustavsen (2003) writes that while PAR is gaining ground, it has still not established itself at the level of institutional change. He states that some things will not change unless we are able to enter and work effectively in the corridors of power, influence and have an impact on questions of policy and gradually change the quality of discourse. Levin(2007) argues that it is vital to “locate AR in institutions of higher education because this creates legitimacy for

AR. Institutions of higher education are probably the most fruitful arena that can connect legitimacy and diffusion.”

Coghlan (2008) points to the paradox that while there are continual complaints about relevance and the gap between academic research and practitioners, academic research continues to support a mode of research that apes the natural sciences and separates theory from practice. He argues that we must “continue to batter at that door . . . however firmly it is locked and barred so that action research does not disappear” (p. 701).

Cultivated on the spikes of social justice, PAR projects are designed to amplify demands and critique from the bottom up and to elaborate alternative possibilities for justice. Legitimizing democratic inquiry, PAR signifies a fundamental right to ask, investigate, dissent, and demand what could be (Fine & Torre, 2006). To paraphrase Geoff Mead (2002), institutions have been good at “activating their immune responses” to the values and practices of PAR. The potential contributions of PAR are limited if conditions continue to be a marginal force within universities; through my experiences, this challenge is daunting.

Recommendations for Future Research

This PAR study is limited in significant ways and the findings of this study can only be seen as suggestive. However, I hope it will further the understanding of facilitating PAR with co-researchers to find solutions to local problems they have identified themselves. I also hope it will encourage reflection and

theoretical discussion of PAR as an approach where theory and practice meet to further PAR principles.

PAR has come a long way in learning how to develop mutuality in conversation, collaboration in small groups, and wider networks of participative relationships. Many of the PAR accounts available to us demonstrate a desire to contribute toward a better future. However, the challenges of using this approach continue. My experience of this project raises several concerns for further consideration. My recommendations come from these experiences located simultaneously within the university context and facilitating a PAR project within my community. These include the need to reconcile epistemological differences between PAR and traditional positivist approaches in social research and finding alternative ethical review processes for PAR dissertations. My recommendations follow.

Reconciling Epistemological Differences Between Participatory Action Research and Traditional Positivist Approaches in Social Research

PAR's tenuous relationship to higher education is noticeable throughout the scholarly literature (Gustavsen, 2003; Levin & Greenwood, 2008; Lincoln, 2005; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). The complexity of PAR projects are evident along with a number of opportunities for misunderstanding. Given the resistance I experienced carrying out this study along with the power and interests that worked against it, future research could focus on finding strategies that might prove useful in overcoming the struggle this kind of work generates. It will also be important to discover what else will be required for such work to be

successful. To answer such questions, the experiences and views of community members, students, and university staff must be drawn out and examined. In order to reconcile differences, agendas must be developed and pursued in critically constructive ways, mindful of difficult realities that stand in the way. The process of interaction itself within a participatory process can play a key role in changing constructions, contribute to mutualistic relations and opens up possibilities for change.

There is clearly a need for future conversations in the PAR community itself. Peers and colleagues need to take advantage of opportunities to collaborate and learn more from each in order to reflect on how to make our presence felt. We need to strive to enhance our understanding of how universities might contribute to expanding and deepening democratic practices and contributions to PAR. Solutions require universities, students, and community members to undergo several fundamental reconfigurations in attitudes, identities, and practices, each of which generates significant resistance.

It is not just the exchange of information to increase understandings; it is appreciating both our common purposes and our differences as well. It is necessary to acknowledge differences and diversity, and re-conceptualize collective solutions, agendas and alliances. This challenges us to engage universities in a more vigorous manner by articulating clearly what we can do to facilitate the emergence of communicative spaces, to create more public accounts and practice theories to justify our claims. The viability and

sustainability of PAR depends on our ability to make a case for its value and significance, develop effective ways for it to be pursued, and to organize and maintain a space for it in the university.

These conversations are not limited to the PAR community. Universities also must contribute to a better understanding of the barriers influencing social science research agendas and approaches. A critical task for universities in their responsibilities to work toward reconciliation of these differences is their willingness to examine the forces that continue to promote and maintain their current approach to research. Without broader and deeper institutional transformations, meaningful and sustained processes for educating competent PAR researchers in the context of ongoing programs of social change are quite limited.

As I experienced in my doctoral program, it is essential for universities to make PAR an available teaching and research strategy that is sustainable as a valid epistemological choice. Social science research programs ought to be expanded in order to engage in more socially active and responsible research. Universities must remain open to finding new ways to accommodate the education of PAR researchers and design different curricula applicable to training them. No other role in social science demands a broader spectrum of capacities, bridging practical problem solving, reflective and analytical thinking than action research (Levin, 2008). They need to consider how to minimize obstacles for students in order for them to become engaged in PAR in meaningful ways. This

can be accomplished not only through specific learning experiences provided in courses but with individual mentoring relationships as well.

PAR researchers must have the ability to initiate and support involvement in action as well as capabilities to critically reflect on process and outcomes of actions taken. Proficiency is needed in a broad spectrum of capacities in order to bridge practical problem solving with reflective and analytical thinking. More research is needed on successful ways to revitalize social research in universities so that PAR researcher's roles and skills are developed and nurtured in ways to make meaningful contributions in the ongoing scientific and broader societal discourses.

The need for creating more equitable, participatory universities and communities grows greater each day. In order to build our theoretical understanding and practical application of participation there is a window here for seeking change by building new relationships, by creating new awareness of the need for PAR and by demonstrating valuable results. While mainstream universities are entrenched by nature, changes taking place in the wider society will ultimately have to be faced by universities (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). The more the university staff engages with the real world, the better their understanding of the types of change needed and demanded by society.

*Alternative Ethical Review Processes for Participatory Action Research
Dissertations*

This study has made clear the difficulties of engaging with the IRB committee and some fundamental differences in the basic conceptualization of ethical concerns between the IRB and PAR. Carrying out this PAR project raised critical questions relevant to the ethical challenges brought about by applying the IRB's conventional standards in the context of a research project utilizing PAR.

While discussions on ethics are woven throughout the philosophy of PAR; I have found that PAR still lacks a well developed way of talking about and understanding ethics. I believe ethics needs to become more apparent as a defining principle of PAR also. PAR needs to continue to find opportunities to bring greater attention to the question of ethics into every aspect of our practice as PAR researchers. By clarifying ethics within this frame, it may expand opportunities to bridge the gap with the IRB. This implies a new understanding of PAR ethics that go beyond traditional ethical concerns regarding such things as confidentiality and protection of research subjects, to ask questions about who participates in and benefits from the research processes, how information is used and by whom, and how the process transforms or supports power relations.

The literature is clearly showing the need to build bridges between constituencies along with the need for new models in addressing ethics inherent to PAR. Although finding a more meaningful place for PAR in university spaces has begun, clearly more time and discussion is necessary for thoughtful examination of the ethical implications of PAR research (Boser, 2006). There

appears to be little PAR work in the literature that examines universities at close range or that works with the question of how practically to transform them into institutions that promote democracy in a broad sense of the term.

The system of protecting human subjects of research rests on the efforts of dedicated, hard-working individuals devoted to fundamental principals of ethical research. While the human subject review process is an important and generally helpful set of guidelines designed to safeguard the interests of those taking part in research, the current system is not working, as it should. It is time to refine and refocus regulations, policies and practices in order to rededicate our energies and attention to fundamental ethical goals. I recommend the following alternative strategies for improving the process, especially in terms of how it relates to the distinct nature and demands of action research.

First, there is a need for refinements to the IRB regulatory system that will provide a set of regulations designed for non-biomedical research. This will enable IRBs to direct attention to the areas of greatest risk while intentionally scaling back oversight in areas of lesser risk. These refined regulations would provide appeal procedures and guidelines specific to social science proposals. Universities might develop different tracks and methods by which to review these research proposals, tailoring the review process depending on such criteria as the field and methods of research. This process would discard the “one-size-fits-all” approach that relies so heavily on criteria and procedures developed for biomedical research.

Second, IRBs need methodological guidance to use in their deliberations and decisions. Specifically for PAR, they need access to examples of risk vs. harm, practice vs. research, confidentiality vs. anonymity, etc. This means being clearer about the severity of various kinds of outcomes and setting priorities accordingly. In part, this requires clarifying the application of certain keywords, such as “risk” and “harm,” in non-biomedical models, such as PAR. An important aspect of approaching the review process by PAR methodology is that the IRBs become more sensitive to ways in which they can do more harm to PAR by forcing regulations that don’t fit.

A third possibility would be to vary the closeness of review in relation to the level and type of risk and to the vulnerability of the participants. These interrelated criteria begin with the assumption that for autonomous adults acting in presumptively public domains, a certain level of risk is unavoidable, and that the illusory pursuit of zero risk inevitably comes at the cost of other important benefits. The IRB should acknowledge the limitations of their control over the actions of participants in AR projects.

While there are no easy solutions, questions must be asked, rather than assuming that a single model fits all types of research. The well motivated traditions have come to be applied in inappropriate ways to methodologies such as PAR, for which they were never designed. These questions must be addressed openly, thoughtfully, and systematically.

Finally, Brydon-Miller and Greenwood (2006) remind us that:

IRB approval is only the first stage and the minimum ethical standards to

which we must hold ourselves. We must continually challenge ourselves and one another to take responsibility for ensuring that our projects do real good for real people; that the claim to serve as agents of social change is not an empty one. And we must resist complacency and a conviction of our own moral superiority by continually revisiting the issue of research ethics in both our teaching and our practice, to ensure that we hold ourselves, our students, and our colleagues and co-workers to the highest possible standards. (p. 117-128)

This PAR project provides an opening on how participatory research reframes and extends institutional ethical principles by connecting everyday struggles within a broader social and political context. It is possible however, to envision that IRB and PAR researchers may be able to work together effectively to conduct this type of research while ensuring respect for the needs and interests of all human research participants.

Recommendations for Future Participatory Action Researchers in University Settings

It is my hope that my experiences in this study illuminated some of the theoretical and methodological contradictions still unresolved in conducting PAR in a university setting so that future PAR researchers may gain some guidance for their work and find the courage to continue pursuing alternative avenues to legitimize PAR. The following four suggestions are offered in the spirit of support so that others may not become immobilized by unsettled issues and

remain committed to achieving the goals of PAR.

First, it is imperative right from the beginning to be thoughtful and deliberate in forming your dissertation committee. It is key that they are open to alternative paradigms in research approaches and willing to learn with you as well as mentor and teach you. The capability to critically reflect on process and outcomes is vital to a PAR approach with your co-researchers but it is invaluable to have this space available with your dissertation committee also, especially your dissertation chair, along the way.

Second, it is also important for doctoral students doing PAR form and/or participate in dissertation/peer review groups that will support continuous cycles of learning and push them to more thoroughly understand what they are seeing and doing. It is very easy to become disconnected from other students once the dissertation process begins. If I were to do one thing differently, I would have paid more attention to creating this type of supportive environment to challenge my thinking, to share alternative points of views, and to point out inconsistencies in my thinking. As well, the conflicts that emerged with the IRB were taxing emotionally and led to important reflections on the nature of ethics in a PAR project. Having other doctoral students to reflect with me on this could have been very helpful.

Third, a central principal of PAR is to begin with real-life issues that originate in and are identified by a particular community. A common identity develops with recognition of each other's knowing and expertise. However, relationship building within this context is a time-consuming endeavor and there

is no way to shorten this process. It is important for the PAR researcher to approach these relationships with transparency and clarity about one's positions as well as the expectations for the community. This requires frequent meetings as well as informal time to get to know each other at the beginning of meetings. The process of creating a framework for collaborative work always takes longer than one imagines, but the time invested will add immensely to building a foundation of trust among the researcher and co-researchers.

Finally, juggling the complexities involved with different roles and identities may present a challenge to the doctoral student. Being an Executive Director, doctoral student, researcher, and participant-observer was at times extremely demanding. It required having a tolerance for ambiguity and messiness that are related to PAR. I suggest that future PAR researchers spend time gaining an awareness of the multiple roles they bring into the research process. It is important to identify from the beginning the roles, values, beliefs and experiences that will impact the research design and process. This understanding of self becomes an ongoing discovery throughout the study.

Final Reflections

I experienced a reconstruction of my own meaning of power and voice as a result of participating in this project with these four co-researchers. I am convinced that this research was worth doing and believe the co-researchers have their own stories about how this project impacted their lives. I chose a PAR approach as a way of integrating my philosophy and values. This is how I was

able to stay connected and engaged during the most difficult encounters during this research. According to Reason and Marshall (2001), projects “need to touch hearts some way if it is to sustain them” (p. 415).

Leadership

I carried out this study as dissertation research for the PhD Program in “Administration and Leadership, Nonprofit and Public Sectors”, at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Doing this PAR research contributed to my administrative and leadership development and capacity through the application of theory and research in a nonprofit evaluation project. While there were several leadership opportunities for both the co-researchers and me during this study, I will comment on two specific lessons that increased my understanding of leadership.

First, I learned that there is power in finding one’s voice and this is critical to becoming an authentic leader. To be credible to those working with me, it was important to give voice to my values, beliefs and assumptions and be willing to stand up for my beliefs. This PAR project provided me with opportunities to transform values into actions, visions into realities, obstacles into innovations and risks into rewards. It strengthened my abilities to share “power with” co-researchers’ to get important work accomplished. This occurred through the amount of time the co-researchers and I spent together, of working side by side, of telling stories that made our values come alive, of sticking together during

times of uncertainty and spending time in reflection in order to think about our values and priorities.

The second key lesson I learned is that leadership is about relationships characterized by a genuine belief in and advocacy for the interests of others. The importance of building and sustaining human connections between the co-researchers and me was related to our ability to create a climate of collaboration, respect and trust. Space was provided for alternative viewpoints, as well as other people's expertise and abilities. The co-researchers became mobilized because they had a sense of ownership and commitment. When leadership is a relationship founded on trust, others are more willing to take risks and make changes.

Transformation. PAR is oriented toward improving unsatisfactory situations and is meant to overcome the passiveness of the research process by turning research itself into a transformative activity (Maguire, 2004). While I can say that it was a transformative experience for me, transformation was a difficult thing to gauge in this PAR project. However, as Maguire (1990) suggests:

Transformation, social and personal, is not an event. It is a process that we are living through, creating as we go . . . we never know when we begin where the work will take us and those involved. Perhaps that is what allows us to begin The point is to learn and grow from doing, and to celebrate the doing, no matter how flawed, small scale, or less than ideal.
(p. 176)

In closing I quote Freire (1994) one final time:

Let me put it this way: you never get *there* by starting from *there*; you get there by starting from some *here*. This means ultimately, that the educator must not be ignorant of, underestimate, or reject any of the knowledge of living experience. (p. 58)

By beginning *here* and by initiating a conversation about power and voice as it relates to the Early Head Start mothers lived experiences, we did manage to begin the process. This PAR project afforded us the opportunity to be involved in a process, with all its complexities and contradictions to allow our views to change over time, both individually and collectively. Using a PAR methodology led us to move toward a more comprehensive and critical perspective about ourselves and about the overall system of power and voice of which we are all an integral part. Although we made small steps, they were important ones that provided us with opportunities to keep the conversation alive. I share these reflections in the hope that others may benefit from this work in order to build capacity for future PAR projects.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Pre-Interview Questions

General Interview Guide

1. In what ways do you expect that the other co-researchers will want to hear what you have to say during your involvement in this project?
2. Do you believe that your input has been used during your involvement in Early Head Start? If so, how? If not, in what ways have you not been heard?
3. Does it matter that people value what you have to say; why/why not?
4. How do you perceive the other co-researchers as having a sense that what they say is important?
5. Why did you decide to become involved?
6. What are your concerns as we begin?

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

An Action Research Approach with Early Head Start Families and Community Stakeholders

The Early Head Start Program in Venango County is participating in a research study. We are inviting you to participate with us. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision on whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. You are eligible to participate because of your interest and involvement with the Early Head Start program.

A group of Early Head Start families and community members in Venango County want to find out if the effects of the Early Head Start program are helpful to families once their involvement with the program is over. An action research approach will be used for this project. This is an approach to research that is based on a group of people working together to solve a problem in their community and create new ways of doing things. A key part of action research is that those who help solve the problems are those people who experience these issues directly.

The primary purpose of the study is to observe the process of this project. What this means is that all will be given an opportunity to be heard and to have their perspectives on topics shared within the group.

The research will involve the following: 1) interviews before and after the project, 2) attendance at meetings, and 3) group interviews. Meetings and interviews will be taped. Meetings will last two hours, individual interviews will last one hour and group interviews will last two and one-half hours.

For Early Head Start families participating in this research, compensation will be provided by way of a \$10.00 gift certificate for Walmart immediately after the meetings. Also child-care, transportation and food will be available during the meetings.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with Early Head Start. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Services that you receive will in no way be affected or influenced by your willingness to participate. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw at any time by notifying the researcher. Upon your request to withdraw, all information pertaining to you will be destroyed. If you choose to participate, all information will be held in strict confidence. There should be little or no risk to you for taking part in this project. The information obtained in this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but your identity will be kept strictly confidential. All who are involved, as part of the co-research team, will be invited to and have a right to co-authorship if you desire.

To withdraw from the research or ask any further questions, please feel free to contact either of us listed below.

Please sign on the attached page to indicate that you have been informed of the research and agree to participate in it. We appreciate your interest in this project and look forward to working with you.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM:

I have read and understand the information on the form and I consent to volunteer to be a participant in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this Informed Consent form to keep in my possession.

Participant Name

Date

Participant Signature

Phone number or location where you can be reached:

Best days and times to reach you:

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature.

Barbara A. Feroz, Doctoral Candidate
Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP)
Department of Sociology
McElhaney Hall, Room 102
Indiana, Pennsylvania 15705
(724) 357- 3163
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Dr. Susan Boser, Assistant Professor (Dissertation Chair)
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This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human subjects (Phone: 724-357-7730).

APPENDIX C

Letter to Early Head Start Families

Dear _____,

The EHS Program in Venango County is participating in a research study to design a measurement scale to determine long-term outcomes for Early Head Start families. We are inviting you to join us in this project. Barb Feroz, Executive Director of Community Services, is also a doctoral student at Indiana University of PA, and is doing her dissertation on this topic. We are very excited about this opportunity and hope you will be able to join us in some way.

There are many aspects of EHS that make it a successful program. It is important for us to hear directly from you what you think is working for this program and also what parts of EHS you think will make an impact on families and children in the long term.

There are several ways that you can become involved with us. These include:

- Member of co-research team
- Member of action research project only
- Participate in focus group
- Fill out survey
- Share information through individual interviews
- Need more information to decide
- Want to attend orientation meeting
- Want someone to call me
- Not interested

Please circle the areas that you are interested in and return to us in the enclosed stamped, self addressed envelope. Once we receive all the information back, we will be in touch with those that are interested.

We are looking forward to hearing from you and having you join us in this worthwhile project. Thank you for your time!!

Sincerely,

EHS Policy Council

APPENDIX D

Interactive Group Interview

1. Share with the group what has been most interesting for you so far with this research project.
2. Is this project what you expected? If so, in what ways? If no, in what ways did it not?
3. There have been many opportunities for your voice to be heard so far as this project has developed. Tell us a time when you felt your voice made a contribution. Supporting evidence?
4. Tell us a time when your voice wasn't heard. Supporting evidence.
5. Can you identify any ways that the principles of Participatory Action Research may have contributed to your voice being heard during the development of this project so far?
6. Is there anything we need to do differently?
7. Has being involved in this project changed you, and if so, in what ways?
8. Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX E

Summary/Time-Line of Key Events

- March 2004 Dissertation proposal accepted by dissertation committee
- April 2004 Doctoral student named Executive Director of Community Services
- April 2004 First meeting with IRB to gain approval of dissertation
- May 2004 IRB denied dissertation project due to dual-role conflict concerns
- April 2004 - July 2004 Doctoral student makes several attempts to articulate rationale of PAR in order to gain approval for Early Head start staff to be part of study
- August 2004 Dissertation proposal accepted without Early Head Start staff involvement
- January 2005- July 2005 Research carried out with four co-researchers.
- April 2005 Co-researchers invite collaborative board members to join PAR project; no one accepts invitation
- April 2005- June 2005 Co-researchers attend several trainings
- June 2005 Co-researchers successfully extend second invitation to meet with collaborative board members
- June 2005 –July 2005 Co-researchers conduct focus groups and individual interviews with Early head Start families
- June 2005-July 2005 Co-researchers conduct focus groups with Early Head Start staff
- August 2005 Letter from IRB to stop research due to complaint received
- August 2005 Doctoral student sent all data from research to IRB
- September 2005 IRB sent letter with 17 questions to be answered by doctoral student
- October 2005 Doctoral student sent responses to questions

- November 2005 Doctoral student and dissertation chairperson met with Audit Committee
- November 2005 Audit committee required full resubmission of protocol prior to starting research again
- December 2005 Doctoral student met with dissertation committee; received their approval to begin writing dissertation
- December 2005 Dissertation committee sent invitation to IRB to meet with us to discuss ways to incorporate their perspectives into dissertation
- January 2006 met with co-researchers to share IRB experience
- April 2006 No written response received from IRB
- May 2006 Began writing dissertation
- July 2008 Sent final draft to dissertation chairperson
- November 2008 Defense date

APPENDIX F

Letters from Institution Review Board

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

School of Graduate Studies and Research
Office of the Assistant Dean for Research
Stright Hall, Room 113
210 South Tenth Street
Indiana, Pennsylvania 15705-1081

724-357-7730 - Assistant Dean for Research
724-357-2224 - Thesis and Dissertation
724-357-2439 - Centers and Institutes
724-357-7697 - FAX
Internet: <http://www.iup.edu/graduate/research>

March 23, 2004

Barbara Feroz
193 South Main Street
Seneca, PA 16346

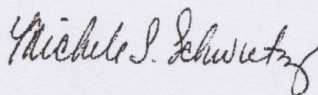
Dear Ms. Feroz:

I recently received your Research Topic Approval Form requesting approval for your dissertation topic entitled, "An Action Research Approach with Early Head Start Families, Practitioners and Community Stakeholders."

After a careful review of your project summary, I feel that your research may require human subjects review. Please complete the enclosed Human Subjects Review Protocol, and return it to my office as soon as possible. The form is also available by clicking on Appendix A on our website at <http://www.iup.edu/graduate/irb/guidelines.shtml>.

Also enclosed is a memorandum explaining the process of the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects Committee and the instructions for completing the forms. Failure to complete the forms as directed will delay the process, so please follow the instructions carefully. If you have any further questions, please call my office at (724) 357-7730.

Sincerely,



Michele S. Schwietz
Assistant Dean for Research

MS:bjo/req-irb

Enclosure

xc: Dr. Susan Boser, Committee Chairperson ✓

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

School of Graduate Studies and Research
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724-357-7697 - FAX
Internet: <http://www.iup.edu/graduate/research>

May 5, 2004

Ms. Barbara A. Feroz
193 South Main Street
Seneca, PA 16346

Dear Ms. Feroz:

On Wednesday, April 21, 2004, the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) evaluated your proposed research project, "An Action Research Approach with Early Head Start Families, Practitioners, and Community Stakeholders," (Log No. 2117). During the course of the discussion, the research team disclosed that the primary investigator is the Executive Director of the agency in which the potential participants are employed. Until this is resolved, the project is denied.

Before the disclosure of the unresolved dual roles, the following revisions were also delineated and are also part of the condition for approval:

Protocol

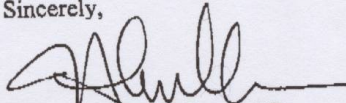
1. The relationship between the researcher and participants needs to be more clearly defined in order to address the concern of dual relationships.
2. Explain how you will remain separate in your role as the Executive Director of Community Services and what safeguards during the study will be provided to the staff that is under your supervision.
3. Clarify your affiliation and capacity with Early Head Start and explain why the Grant Administrator contacted you to conduct this study.
4. In the Methods & Recruitment" section, provide in complete detail the recruitment process and what your involvement with the recruitment will entail. Also explain how the subjects will be contacted and provide to the IRB a copy of the letter of recruitment the Policy Council will be sending to the subjects.
5. To protect the staff members, insert safeguards that will be used during the study.
6. To assure anonymity and to ensure that the researcher will not know the participants, create and explain in detail a complete two group process. The one group will be the actual participants and the second group will not be a part of the study. Describe what safeguards will be in place so the researcher does not know who participates in the study.
7. On page 4, revise paragraph 4. Explain what written documents will be provided, who owns the documents and who will provide them to the researcher. Clarify that the documents that you will be reviewing are not medical or educational in nature. Also, clarify the specific content of email correspondence that will be reviewed and describe what safeguards will be provided for monitoring purposes.
8. A letter of research site approval must be submitted on letterhead.

9. After the revisions as recommended by the board have been addressed, Dr. Mills advised Dr. Boser and Barbara Feroz to schedule a meeting with him and Michele Schwietz, Chair of the IRB, to address the dual relationship issues.

Informed Consent

1. Add the statement advising the participant that the interview will be taped.
2. Provide the length of time needed to conduct the complete interview process.
3. Explain what type of compensation will be given to the participants of the study and any services provided during the interview process.

Sincerely,



John A. Mills, Ph.D., ABPP
Co-Chairperson

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

JAM:jeb

pc: ✓ Susan Boser, Faculty Advisor, Department of Sociology
Beverly Obitz, Thesis and Dissertation Secretary

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June 29, 2004

Ms. Barbara A. Feroz
193 South Main Street
Seneca, PA 16346

Dear Ms. Feroz:

On Wednesday, June 16, 2004, the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) evaluated your proposed research project, "An Action Research Approach with Early Head Start Families, Practitioners, and Community Stakeholders," (Log No. 2117). In addition to reviewing the protocol on June 16, a second meeting was held on June 21, 2004 to finalize the Board's recommendations. The project is denied due to the following issues:

Dual Role Conflict - When the doctoral student first submitted her protocol for review and approval, her role with the agency was one of a consultant. Through the course of the protocol review, she became the Executive Director of the agency that oversees the program that she selected for her action research project. This change in her status with the agency results in a dual role conflict in that the person who is directing the agency is also researching a process related to one of the agency's grant funded programs. While the researcher provided information stating that her formal role with the agency does not include performance evaluations or hiring/firing decisions for any staff beyond the program director of the grant funded program, her leadership role in the agency is undeniable. She is likely to have an indirect or informal influence over staffing decisions even though she has no formal control over them. It is reasonable to expect that this would lead to a perception by employees that staffing and programmatic decisions are within the scope of her employment, thus leading to the existence of a dual role (director/researcher).

Social/Economic Risk - Given her leadership role with the agency, there is a concern that agency staff may face a greater than minimal social/economic risk, whether they choose to participate in the research or if they refuse to participate in the research. Protections against this greater than minimal risk are not provided given her research design that includes a high level of closeness and direct contact with research participants.

Closeness to research participants - The issue is that of an organizational director serving as the researcher, not that this project is "action research." She needs to provide greater distance between herself and her research participants, given the nature of her dual role with the agency.

Appearance of a Conflict of Interest – The issue is that of the researcher's ability to avoid the perception of a conflict of interest and the ability to remain unbiased. The American Sociological Association's Code of Ethics speaks to this in the following ethical standard.

9. Conflicts of Interest

Sociologists maintain the highest degree of integrity in their professional work and avoid conflicts of interest and the appearance of conflict. Conflicts of interest arise when sociologists' personal or financial interests prevent them from performing their professional work in an unbiased manner. In research, teaching, practice, and service, sociologists are alert to situations that might cause a conflict of interest and take appropriate action to prevent conflict or disclose it to appropriate parties.
(see <http://www.asanet.org/members/ecoderev.html>)

The American Psychological Association Code of Ethical Principles and Code of Conduct (see <http://www.apa.org/ethics/code2002.html>) provide some guidance related to research with subordinate research participants:

8.04 Client/Patient, Student, and Subordinate Research Participants

(a) When psychologists conduct research with clients/patients, students, or subordinates as participants, psychologists take steps to protect the prospective participants from adverse consequences of declining or withdrawing from participation.

A book by Celia Fisher, Decoding the Ethics Code: A Practical Guide for Psychologists¹, provides additional guidance related to this ethical standard:

Clients/patients, students, employees, prisoners, or other institutionalized persons may not feel free to decline or withdraw participation in a study conducted by a psychologist serving as their treatment provider, professor, supervisor, employer, or member of the institutional staff...When power differentials inherent in an existing professional relationship are apparent (such as when the investigator is also the student's professor or a participant's service provider), psychologists should refrain from conducting the informed consent process and any research procedures involving direct contact with the individual....(p. 155)

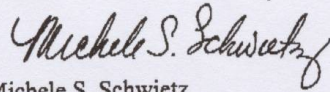
Recommendation – The researcher and her dissertation committee should come up with an alternative to her proposed research project. A recommendation might be that she conducts an action research project with an agency in which she is not the organizational director, or

¹ Fisher, Celia B. Decoding the Ethics Code: A Practical Guide for Psychologists (2003). Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA.

that she redesign her study so that she is not involving her organization's employees in the action research project. This does not preclude her involving staff in the project in some way after the research is completed.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Michele S. Schwietz
Chairperson
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

MSS:jeb

pc: / Susan Boser, Faculty Advisor, Department of Sociology
Beverly Obitz, Thesis and Dissertation Secretary

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July 27, 2004

Barbara Feroz
193 South Main Street
Seneca, PA 16346

Dear Ms. Feroz:

On Wednesday, July 21, 2004, the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) evaluated your proposed research project, "An Action Research Approach with Early Head Start Families, Practitioners, and Community Stakeholders," (Log No. 2117). The project was approved pending submission of the following revisions:

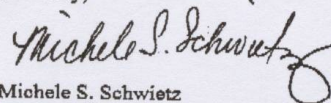
Informed Consent

1. The consent form is written with too technical a level for parents who may have marginal education or English ability. Reword and simplify for participants to better understand the consent form (specifically paragraph 2). For example, in paragraph 2, sentence 2, define "action research" and "collective knowledge and assumptions".
2. To protect the Early Head Start families, define your role and how this role will have no relationship in deciding how services are delivered to the families. Stress that the services they receive will in no way be affected or influenced by their willingness to participate.
3. Explain the distance in the relationship between the researcher and the services families receive. For example, explain that the EHS Program Director is directly responsible for the day to day operations of the program; no more than 20% of your time is allocated to EHS.
4. It should be stated that the "research team" has rights to co-authorship if they so desire.

Please submit an explanation, in writing, of how these conditions will be accomplished. You are not authorized to begin your research until you receive final IRB approval.

Should you choose to not submit revisions or additional information as required by the IRB for their approval, please contact my office at (724)357-7730 or email micheles@iup.edu.

Sincerely,



Michele S. Schwietz
Chairperson
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

MSS:jeb

pc: Susan Boser, Sociology, Faculty Supervisor

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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July 28, 2005

Barbara Feroz
193 South Main Street
Seneca, PA 16346

Dear Ms. Feroz,

As you know, your IRB approval period for your study, "An Action Research Approach with Early Head Start Families, Practitioners, and Community Stakeholders" (Log #2117) ends on August 1, 2005. On that date you must stop all research activities.

The IRB office has received a complaint regarding the conduct of your study. In order to respond to the complaint, the IRB at IUP will conduct a "for cause" audit of your study. The purpose of the audit is to assure that the rights and well being of human subjects are protected and that the study has been conducted in compliance with the approved protocol. The auditing function provides the IRB with a vehicle to achieve verification from sources other than the investigator that the study is being conducted as approved.

The materials that will be reviewed in the audit include:

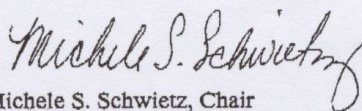
- Currently approved protocol (provided from IRB file)
- Correspondence with the IRB (provided from IRB file)
- Original copies of the signed and dated consent forms for each subject
- Written documentation of the consent process for each subject
- Subject study records and any source documents
- Research records (e.g. subject enrollment log, case report forms, etc.)
- All data entered for analysis

You are asked to provide these materials to the IRB Chair by August 15, 2005. You will be given an opportunity to meet with the IRB audit team after the review of the study documents. When the audit is complete, the IRB audit team will meet with you and your research advisor to discuss the findings. An audit report will be written, and a copy of the report will be sent to you, your research advisor, the IRB, and the university's authorized official on the Federal Wide Assurance that is filed with the federal Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP). Follow up from the findings of the audit may include corrective action.

Barbara Feroz
Page 2
July 28, 2005

The audit will be conducted under strict confidentiality guidelines. The audit report and correspondence will be limited to the researcher, the research advisor, the IRB and other individuals who are responsible for action on audit observations in accordance with IUP's Federal Wide Assurance.

Sincerely,



Michele S. Schwietz, Chair
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Cc: Dr. Susan Boser, Research Advisor ✓

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September 8, 2005

Barbara Feroz
193 South Main Street
Seneca, PA 16346

Re: IRB Audit

Dear Ms. Feroz,

A subcommittee of the IUP IRB recently met to perform a "for cause" audit of your research project, "An Action Research Approach with Early Head Start Families, Practitioners, and Community Stakeholders" (Log 2117). The audit committee carefully reviewed the specifics of the research plan that was approved May 25, 2004 in the final protocol that you submitted to the IRB, and we compared the evidence of work that has been completed as documented in the files that you recently submitted for our review.

When you submitted the data to us, you grouped the folders into two batches, the first group "pertaining to my dissertation specifically" (per your letter of August 11, 2005), and the second group of files "Contains material related to the action research project." In order to ease our analysis and ensure that we were meticulous in our documentation, we labeled all of the files in the first group with Roman Numeral I and the second group Roman Numeral II followed by sequential Arabic numbering within the group. Thus your file entitled "consent forms/pre-interviews" is numbered I-1, the folder "schedule of meetings/agendas" is I-2, and so on. We hope this explanation will make it easier to understand the specific queries that we include below.

We have identified a number of issues that we believe warrant clarification by you before we ultimately decide what actions are appropriate to pursue. Therefore, please respond *in writing* to each of the questions listed below by October 14, 2005. Your letter should be directed to the attention of the IRB Chair at the letterhead address.

We believe it would be helpful to have an opportunity to meet with you and your dissertation advisor, Dr. Boser, in person to resolve any remaining questions. Therefore, please contact the IRB secretary Ms. Julie Bassaro at 724-357-7730 to schedule a conference with the members of the IRB Audit Team. We hope your schedule will permit an on-campus conference.

The specific questions that have emerged from our review are as follows:

1. Informed Consent Form – the form that was utilized and included in file I-1 differs from the approved form on page 10ff of your protocol. While there are several minor changes,

the most significant appears to be the deletion of the text that assures your co-researchers of the option of co authorship. This appears to be in conflict with your letter of August 10, 2004 in which you indicate that "the rights of the 'research team' as co-authors are stated on page eight under potential benefits...and in the informed consent." Please explain.

2. Research Population – The protocol indicates that your intent was to include "minimum of 12-15 participants" (p.4) as the subjects for the research component. You have indicated that there are four co-researchers who are now the focus of your dissertation research. (See your letter that accompanied the files in which you note "for my dissertation I am focusing on the four co-researchers perceptions of how they think their voice is making a contribution to this project using the principles of action research.") Please explain the rationale for the change in the number of participants.

In addition, File I-1 contains only three, not four, signed informed consent forms. We understand from a phone call you made to Ms. Michele Schwietz on September 7, 2005 that the fourth signed informed consent form has been located and that you are forwarding this to us, but we must, for the record, note this discrepancy.

3. Recruitment – the protocol indicated that recruitment of participants as co-researchers will be done by having the Early Head Start Policy Council send letters to various individuals "including current and former Early Head Start parents, community and school stakeholders and county level administrator(s). Once people choose to participate, the policy council will contact them for an orientation meeting. ...To further protect families that choose to become co-researchers, there will be a strong orientation on the principles of action research...(p. 4)." In the data files provided, your handwritten field notes dated 1/28/2005 in file I-5 says "invited initial 5 parents who had expressed interest in working with me in fall; 3 EHS moms, 1 former EHS mom, 1 Head Start family worker." Please clarify whether the recruitment of the four participant co-researchers was actually done by the EHS Policy Council, or whether you used your personal contacts.

4. Recruitment – file II-4 includes an invitation to EHS parents from the EHS Policy Council (dated February 21, 2005) to participate in the project in a variety of ways, including as a "member of co-research team." A similar letter in the same file to the Venango County FOOFCB members (dated April 14, 2005) extends the same invitation. Please clarify how many copies of each of these letters were distributed, how many were returned, and whether any of them generated a volunteer to participate as a co-researcher. How many indicated a willingness to "participate in a focus group, fill out survey, [or] share information through individual interviews?"

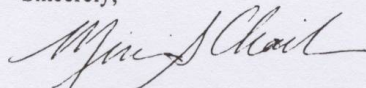
5. File I-2 includes the schedule of meetings of the co-research team, as well as the dates for five focus group interviews and 10 interviews with individual EHS families. Transcripts are included for roughly half of these meetings (3 of 5 focus group interviews, 6 of 10 individual family interviews, 8 of 19 meetings of co research team). Were tape recordings made of additional meetings for which we do not have transcripts? Why are only some of the meetings included?

6. Have any EHS programs, services, protocols, or administrative procedures been altered as a consequence of information generated by the action research process? Have any been altered as a consequence of your dissertation research? If so, please specify.

7. Please describe what progress has been made in the development of the measurement tool that was the goal for the action research component.
8. Have any of the preliminary results or data collected in the work with the research team been shared with EHS administration? Staff? Are any members of the EHS staff or administration privy to the information included in any of the tapes or transcripts?
9. Who has prepared the typed transcripts from interviews, meetings, and focus groups? Is the typist a member of the co researcher team?
10. Has the action research continued during the current hiatus in your dissertation research?
11. File II-1 includes the monthly Family Demographic Survey. Who collects these data, and who has access to these data? Is this the survey form that is an optional response to the invitation letters included in file II-4, or are these data that are collected as part of EHS administrative procedures? Are these data shared with members of the co research team?
12. Please describe the location and conditions of the place in which the data, tapes, computer files, and transcripts are stored.
13. Please describe your plans for utilizing the information included in all of the files in the second batch (those labeled II-1 through II-7) in your dissertation.
14. How is access to the data by the co-research team managed? Do other members of the team have notes, files, or tapes that are not reflected in the data that was sent to us?

We hope these questions are sufficiently clear and that responding to them not too onerous. We are looking forward to having an opportunity to review your responses, and to discuss this with you in the future.

Sincerely,



Miriam S. Chaiken, Ph.D.
Professor
Chair, IRB Audit Team

Cc: Dr. Susan Boser, Dissertation Advisor
Ms. Michele Schwietz, Chair, IUP Institutional Review Board for the Protection
of Human Subjects
Dr. Ramesh Soni, Interim Vice Provost for Research and Dean of Graduate Studies
Dr. Mark Staszkiwicz, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

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November 11, 2005

Barbara Feroz
193 South Main Street
Seneca, PA 16346

Dear Ms. Feroz,

Thank you for coming to the campus to discuss with the IRB Audit Team the issues surrounding your current research. A meeting in person allowed us to gain greater understanding of the issues that were still of concern to the team.

We have some specific measures that we are directing you to follow to rectify some of the problems that were uncovered in the course of the audit, and others that you will have to address in your proposal for renewal of the research. In most cases renewal of a previously approved protocol is a relatively *pro forma* process, but in this instance we believe that a full resubmission of the protocol is warranted, with special attention paid to addressing the on-going concerns raised by the IRB. We must state that we believe the problems that have arisen in the course of this project are a consequence of the lack of a strong and clear distinction between your roles as researcher for the dissertation, Executive Director of the agency and director of an action research process. While these roles may be clear to you, they may not consistently be so in the minds of the individuals with whom you are interacting in this process. Second, we must state for the record that we interpret your inconsistency of data collection and of providing information to our team after being so requested as reflecting an accumulation of error and a careless approach to your responsibilities as a researcher.

Our specific requirements are as follows:

1. The error of using an unapproved, earlier version of the informed consent is a serious deviation from approved procedure. In most institutions, this would be considered sufficiently egregious that the entire research program would be terminated. However, we believe this reflects carelessness rather than malicious intent, and we will permit you to redo the informed consent according to the following specifications:
 - Compose a letter to all the members of your research team and copy the IRB Chairperson in which you explain the nature of the error, assume full responsibility, and request that your research participants complete and date a second informed consent using the *approved* form.

Barbara Feroz

Page 2

November 11, 2005

- Forward the copies of **all** of the signed consents to the IRB for inclusion in your file.
- All of this must be completed before any resumption of research activities.

2. As your permission to conduct research expired at the end of July 2005, you would be required to request a renewal of IRB approval before resuming research as a matter of routine procedure. Given the issues that have arisen, we are asking that you use this renewal process as an opportunity to resolve remaining dilemmas. In the revision of the IRB protocol that you will have to submit for full board review, please be prepared to address the following issues:

- Discuss how the confidentiality of participants is maintained in terms of the exposure they may receive as the typist transcribes tapes. Although there were several opinions offered at our meeting, we remain concerned about whether the typist will be able to identify individuals who are being discussed and as she may be a co-worker of some individuals, how this may affect long-term staff relations. Please discuss your plans to transcribe future tape recordings.
- Please discuss how information that has been obtained through the dissertation research or through the action research has resulted in changes in EHS policy, procedures, or operations. As you noted in our discussions, your awareness of curtailed working hours by some staff resulted in corrective measures, which you undertook as the Executive Director. You indicated that the composition and membership of the FOFCB governing subcommittee changed. You also indicated that data about playgroups was shared with the EHS program director and program coordinator. Please indicate instances in which this conflict of roles has taken place, and what measures you plan to take if such an issue arises again. We believe that in instances of future choice points where there is a conflict between your roles as researcher and as Executive Director it would be appropriate to remove yourself from decision making, or consult with your dissertation advisor or the IRB.
- Clarify how the recruitment of participants in the research project actually transpired. As was clear from our discussions, your four research participants were *not recruited according to the approved procedures*, and none of the approved procedures yielded any volunteers for participation. We believe this reflects poor judgment in the research design, and perhaps naïve assumptions about mitigating the dilemmas created by the dual roles. Please offer a frank discussion of how recruitment actually was carried out, and where there were problems with the process.

Barbara Feroz

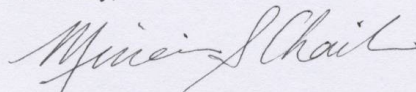
Page 3

November 11, 2005

- Please verify that you will refrain from using *any of the data* that is collected in the monthly survey of EHS participant families. While you may be entitled to review that data as agency director, you are not authorized to use this data as the dissertation researcher.
- Discuss how you plan to share data with members of the co research team, and what are your plans for co authorship with the co researchers.

Please let us know if any of these points require clarification. Thank you for your cooperation in this audit process.

Sincerely,



Miriam S. Chaiken, Ph.D.

Professor

Chair, IRB Audit Team

Cc: Dr. Susan Boser, Doctoral Advisor
Ms. Michele Schwietz, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection
of Human Subjects
Dr. Ramesh Soni, Interim Vice Provost for Research and Dean of
Graduate Studies
Dr. Mark Stazkiewicz, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

APPENDIX G

Letters from Practitioner/Researcher

May 24, 2004

John A. Mills, Phd., ABPP
Co-Chairperson
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Rights
Stright Hall, Room 113
210 South Tenth Street
Indiana, PA 15705-1081

Dear Dr. Mills,

I received your letter of May 5, 2004 outlining revisions needed for my proposed research project, "An Action Research Approach with Early Head Start Families, Early Head Start Practitioners and Community Stakeholders," (Log No. 2117). My responses are as follows:

1. When I defended my dissertation proposal 3/17/04, I was still a Program Director at this agency. On 3/29/04 I was asked by the Board President to be Acting Director, and on 4/22/04 was approved by the Governing Board to be the Executive Director.

While the ultimate legal authority for Early Head Start rests with the Governing Board of Community Services of Venango County, there are several checks and balances provided within the federal regulations of Early Head Start to protect staff from any employment risks they could encounter by choosing to participate as co-researchers in this project. These include:

Early Head Start Performance Standard 1304.50(d) (1) (x) & (xi) states:

- (x) Policy Council will be included in decisions to hire or terminate the Early Head Start Director of the grantee or delegate agency; and
- (xi) Policy Council will be included in decisions to hire or terminate any person who works primarily for the Early Head Start program of the grantee or delegate agency.

2. Organizationally, the Early Head Start Director is directly under my supervision; the rest of the Early Head Start staff report to her or other program coordinators. She is directly responsible for the day to day operations of the program; no more than 20% of my time is allocated to EHS. My role in this project is as a doctoral student and not as Executive Director of the agency. This will be shared with the staff verbally and in the informed consent.
3. My involvement with Community Services of Venango County's Early Head Start Program began when the Grant Administrator for the program contacted me in January 2002 regarding some ideas they had to develop a measurement instrument to evaluate its long-term outcomes of program participants. My relationship with her was professional in that we both worked in human services in Venango County. She knew I was pursuing a doctorate and wondered if I was aware of any software that they could use in this project. I was in the process of finding a field project and we began a dialogue concerning this, and it led to my involvement in this project, not only for my field project but for my dissertation.
4. Early Head Start can usually accommodate up to 116 children; thus there

are usually 70-75 families active at any one time. All will be given an opportunity to voluntarily participate in the development of the outcomes tool at various stages. However, for the co-researcher team that will be working with me on my dissertation, the initial partners will be those that the Early Head Start Policy Council contacts via letter asking for their participation. The Policy Council Chairperson and myself wrote a draft letter(see attached). It will be circulated to the rest of the policy council members for revision. The policy council approved this process at their meeting on 5/14/04. Letters will be sent to those that they decide have a vested interest in the outcomes for Early Head Start families and their children. These letters will be sent to various locations within the local community, including current and former Early Head Start parents, community and school stakeholders and county level administrator(s). If they choose to participate, the policy council will contact them for an orientation meeting. If Early Head Start families or staff do not choose to participate, or chose to withdraw from the study at any time, they can do so without penalty. The Early Head Start program will be informed prior to the beginning of the study that this is voluntary participation, and that families or staff that chose not to participate will not have any benefits of the program withheld from them as a result of this decision.

5. To further protect staff and families that choose to become co-researchers, there will be a strong orientation on the principles of action research that will guide this dissertation and these include:

- Participation
- Critical dialogue
- Democracy
- Knowledge generation
- Reflective practice
- Human flourishing
- Power
- Social change

I believe these are powerful principles and that action research has the ability to contribute to the flourishing of people and communities. It is important for me to take seriously the responsibility to understand the perspectives and concerns of those involved in this process. For me action research is not only a research methodology, but also a philosophy of life. This process will be carried out openly, and group members will arrive at how to handle these concerns through use of the action research principles.

6. In the letter sent out by the Policy Council, potential participants will be advised of different roles they can play in this project, such as:

- Member of co-research team
- Member of action research project only
- Participate in focus group
- Fill out survey
- Share information through individual interviews
- Not interested
- Need more information to decide
- Want to attend orientation meeting
- Want someone to call me

These letters will be returned to Policy Council. When the orientation meeting is held those that come will have opted to be there. Once the co-research team is formed, I will know who chose to participate in the study; this is a team approach; all members will be fully informed. How we proceed from here will be negotiated. Ethnography is about discovering and creating a story; the task at the beginning is to come up with a shared story that explains what we are doing here. How this question is answered by the team will influence its members' ability to answer Agar's (1996) ethnographic question, "What is going on here?"

Having their involvement from the beginning will be important for building trust and developing a sense of engagement and ownership among all partners; it will provide a good foundation for a respectful partnership to guide the study. The final team will collaborate as co-researchers in this project. They will receive an orientation of the project; at the end of the orientation, they will be asked to stay and meet with me individually to complete consent forms.

Please let me know if you have any further questions. I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Barbara Feroz

Cc. Susan Boser, Dissertation Chairperson

August 10, 2004

Michele S. Schwietz, Chairperson
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Rights
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Indiana University Of Pennsylvania
Stright Hall, Room 113
210 South Tenth Street
Indiana, PA 15705-1081

Dear Michele,

Attached are the revisions to my research project, "An Action Research Approach with Early Head Start Families and Community Stakeholders," (Log No. 2117). The changes include:

1. Language in the consent form (p.10) was reworded and simplified for participants to better understand it. Changes were made in paragraph two, three and four.
2. My role as Executive Director with EHS families is defined on page three, paragraphs two. This includes the distance in the relationship between the researcher and the services families receive. Also, protection for the families is stated clearly in the informed consent.
3. The rights of the "research team" as co-authors are stated on page eight under potential benefits, last paragraph; and in the informed consent, paragraph six, last sentence.

Hopefully these revisions meet with your approval. I am looking forward to hearing from you soon. Thank you and the board again for all of your time involved with this project.

Sincerely,

Barbara Feroz
Doctoral Student

Cc: Susan Boser, Doctoral Chairperson

August 11, 2005

Michelle Schwietz, Assistant Dean for Research
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Office of the Assistant Dean for Research
Stright Hall, Room 113
210 South Tenth Street
Indiana, PA 15705-1081

Dear Michelle,

I am sending the material for the audit of my dissertation in two envelopes. In this envelope there are five files pertaining to my dissertation specifically. These are:

- Consent forms/pre-interviews
- Schedule of research committee meeting/Agendas
- Transcripts of seven research team meetings
- One interactive group interview
- Field notes
- Principals of Action Research

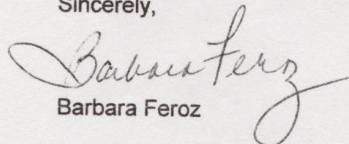
The second envelope contains seven files of material related to the action research project of gathering information to design a measurement scale to determine long-term outcomes for Early Head Start families. These are:

- Community outcomes/indicators; Early Head Start outcomes/indicators
- Collaborative Board Information
- Trainings attended
- Letters sent
- Transcripts of three Focus Groups
- Transcripts of six individual interviews

I have been an active participant throughout the project, but for my dissertation I am focusing on the four co-researchers perceptions of how they think their voice is making a contribution to this project using the principles of action research.

Please contact me if there is other information you need. I will be on vacation from 8/15-19; I will return to work on 8/22.

Sincerely,


Barbara Feroz

10/06/05

Michelle Schwietz, Chair, IUP Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Office of Assistant Dean for Research
Stright Hall, Room 113
210 South Tenth St,
Indiana, PA 15705-1-48

Dear Ms. Schwietz,

I received the letter from the IRB Audit Team with the specific questions that emerged during your review of the files for my research project, "An Action Research Approach with Early Head Start Families, Practitioners, and Community Stakeholders" (Log 2117). Following are my responses to the 14 questions asked.

1. Informed Consent Form: In reviewing my dissertation files to understand why a different form was used, I discovered that I did not save the changes to the final consent form sent on 8/10/05 to the IRB, School of Graduate Studies and Research. The co-researchers were given the previous consent that had been sent to the IRB. This was an error on my part and was not intentional.
2. a. Research population: My initial intentions were to recruit a minimum of 12-15 participants as the subjects for the research component. However, once the recruitment began for the research population, only four participants came forward that were willing to invest the time and energy needed to be involved in the intense demands of this project. While there were 15 parents that expressed an interest in wanting more information regarding the project, once they were given a clear, detailed overview of what was involved, they could not commit to being part of the co-research team. However, they were willing to be involved in other ways with the project, such as focus groups and individual interviews.

b. Missing consent form: Since the original consent forms were sent to the IRB Audit Team, I made a copy for my files. In reviewing my files, I found an original stuck to the back of a copy. I called Michelle Schwietz immediately and put it in the mail to her that day.
3. Recruitment: Policy Council members opted to be co-researchers. Therefore the recruitment was actually done by the EHS Policy Council.
4. Recruitment: Policy Council sent 90 letters to all enrolled EHS parents to participate in the project in a variety of ways. 52 responded; no responses generated a volunteer to participate as a co-researcher. Six responses indicated a willingness to participate in a focus group, 31 in a survey, and 20 indicated a willingness to share information through an individual interview. Some responses had multiple areas checked.

Policy Council sent 45 letters to active members of FOOFB to participate in the project in a variety of ways. Nine responded; no responses generated a volunteer to participate as a co-researcher. One response indicated a willingness to

participate in a focus group, seven in a survey and one indicated a willingness to share information through an individual interview.

5. File I-2: Tape recordings were made of additional meetings for which the IRB Audit Team does not have. The reasons are as follows:

- Focus group interviews: The co-research team wanted to interview EHS staff. Due to my dual role conflict concerns expressed by the IRB in a letter dated 6/29/04, I was not able to be involved with staff focus groups. Therefore, two co-researchers facilitated two focus groups with the EHS staff. The tapes were given to the administrative assistant who typed the transcripts, and filed them, along with the tapes in a locked file cabinet in her office. She has the only key. I have not seen these transcripts. The data on these transcripts are for the action research project only. The co-research team will review the transcripts once analysis of the action research project begins. Therefore, I did not send these transcripts.
- Individual interviews: On two occasions, the tape player malfunctioned and did not record. Notes were taken during these sessions. Two other interviews were transcribed that I did not send. Since the individual interviews are information for the action research project only, I thought six of the ten interviews would be enough for the committee to review. These two transcriptions, along with the notes from the two other interviews are included with this letter.
- Co-research Team meetings: The first four meetings with the co-researchers (2/7, 2/14, 2/21, 2/28) were not taped. This was done to help with the initial building of relationships, along with providing the EHS mothers with an opportunity to become more comfortable with the setting. It also helped to set the stage for trust and safety to develop.

4/04 and 4/05 were not recorded because they were practice sessions for the co-researchers presentation to the collaborative board.

5/16 was not recorded because it was a training on logic models

6/6 and 6/30: tape player was turned on but malfunctioned and did not record the sessions.

6/13 was not recorded because time was spent setting up schedules for focus groups and individual interviews.

7/25 was not recorded because I shared the letter from IRB that the project needed to stop due to renewal form getting in late. Plans were made to meet once I received permission to begin again.

6. No EHS programs, services, protocols, or administrative procedures at Community Services of Venango County have been altered as a consequence of information generated by the action research process. None have been altered as a consequence of my dissertation research. However, changes were made at

FOOFCB as a result of FOOFCB members participating in a focus group. These include:

- Changing the name of the EHS task force to EHS Governing Board and moving the EHS report to monthly and further up on the Agenda.
- Re-convening the EHS Governing Board with new members as a sub-committee of the FOOFCB.

These are significant because co-researchers facilitated the focus group and shared their concerns that the FOOFCB was not fulfilling their responsibilities to the EHS program.

7. Progress that has been made in the development of the measurement tool includes education/ training of the co-researchers on County outcomes/indicators, logic models, focus groups and conducting individual interviews. The intent of the focus groups and individual interviews has been to identify the constructs that EHS parents, former EHS parents and community members feel are important in the development of the tool. Data collection is not complete.
8. In the course of some individual interviews, I received information that some EHS home visitors told families that they could not schedule appointments after 3:30. I shared this information with the EHS Program Director and the EHS Program Coordinator. No staff were identified through this information. I did not share this information with the staff.

Preliminary data indicates that families do not think playgroups are working well. I shared this information with the EHS program Director and EHS Program Coordinator in order to confirm information they already had. Attendance at playgroups has been significantly low and was already on the list as a priority to look at ways to improve. As of this date, 9/05, no changes have been made to the playgroups.

EHS staff and administration are not privy to the information included in any of the tapes or transcripts.

9. The typed transcripts from interviews, meetings, and focus groups have been prepared by the secretary for Community Services of Venango County. She is not a member of the co-researcher team.
10. The action research has not continued during the hiatus in my dissertation research.
11. The Family Demographic information in File II-1 is collected by the EHS home visitors on each family they serve. EHS home visitors only have access to the data collected from the families they serve. Executive Director, EHS Program Director, EHS Program Coordinator, EHS data entry staff person, County Administrator, National Head Start Office and Dr. John Zhang from IUP have access to these data.

This survey is not the one that was an optional response to the invitation letters included in file II-4. These data are collected as part of EHS administrative procedures. The agency data will be used as another source of identifying

constructs that are meaningful for designing the measurement tool. These data have not been shared with the co-research team. This data is for the action research project, not my dissertation.

12. The location of the place in which the data, tapes, computer files, and transcripts are stored and secured is at my home office at 193 South Main St, Seneca, PA. My office is located in a separate building on my property. While my husband has a key to my office, I have the only key to the file the data are kept in. I am the only one with access to the password on my computer.

The only files not in my possession are the two staff focus group transcripts/tapes. They are in a locked file cabinet in the secretary's office locked on the third floor of the Transit Building, 206 Seneca St, Oil City, PA. The secretary locks her door at the end of the day. The Facility Coordinator has a key to her office; however, she has the only key to the file cabinet that these two files are in. I do not know the location of that key. She has assured me that she is the only one who knows where the key is located.

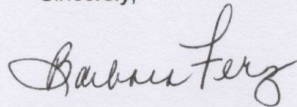
13. The information included in all of the files in the second batch (those labeled II-1 through II-7) will be used for the action research project. The program documents in the files are public information and will be used to provide the context for the dissertation. The transcripts are for the action research project only and not intended for use with the dissertation.

14. The co-research team has not had access to the data up to this point. The co-research team knows that I have secured the data and that the team will review it after data collection is completed. Any notes that the co-researchers took during individual interviews of focus groups have been shared with me and are in my possession for safekeeping. They have no other individual/group notes, files, or tapes that are reflected in the data sent to you.

Each co-researcher has a binder containing training information that they have gathered since the project began, along with any notes they took during the trainings/in-services attended.

I hope I have been able to answer these questions clearly for you. I am looking forward to having an opportunity to meet with you and discuss any remaining questions you have regarding my dissertation.

Sincerely,



Barbara Feroz

Cc: Dr. Susan Boser, Dissertation Chair

November 7, 2005

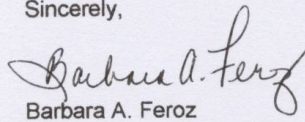
Michelle, Schwietz, Chair, IUP Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Office of Assistant Dean for Research
Stright Hall, Room 113
210 South Tenth St.
Indiana, PA 15705

Dear Ms. Schwietz,

Enclosed is a copy of Community Service of Venango County, Inc. Governing Board letter and a copy of the secretary's confidentiality statement signed when her employment began at the agency. Both of these were requested by the IRB Audit Team at the meeting on November 2, 2005.

I hope to hear from the IRB Audit Team soon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Barbara A. Feroz".

Barbara A. Feroz

Cc: Dr. Susan Boser, Dissertation Chair

Community Services of Venango County, Inc.

206 Seneca Street
Oil City, PA 16301
(814) 678-7766
Fax (814) 678-0053

Barbara A. Feroz
Executive Director

39 Parker Avenue
Franklin, PA 16323
(814) 432-5749
Fax (814) 432-5618

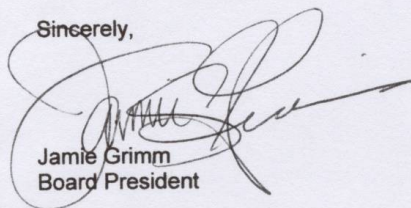
October 24, 2005

Dear Ms. Schweitz,

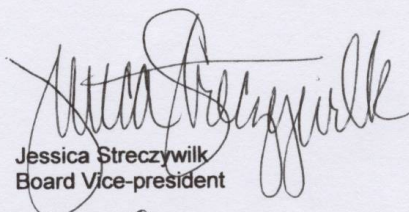
This letter is to inform you that the Governing Board of Directors of Community Services of Venango County, Inc. is in full support of our Executive Director's Action Research Project and Dissertation. We have approved and committed the necessary resources needed to successfully complete both of these projects. These resources include both financial and administrative support needed during this time. We strongly believe that the results will not only benefit our Executive Director, Barbara Feroz, but the agency and community as well.

If you have any further questions regarding this matter, please contact the Board President, Jamie Grimm at 814 - 437-5989.

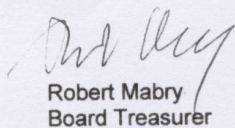
Sincerely,



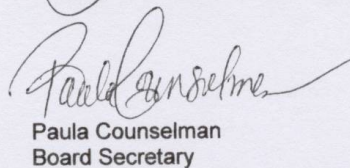
Jamie Grimm
Board President



Jessica Streczywilk
Board Vice-president



Robert Mabry
Board Treasurer



Paula Counselman
Board Secretary

CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

This Confidentiality Policy has been adopted to assure confidentiality and protection of individual rights to privacy for children, families, volunteers, and employees of Community Services of Venango County, Inc (CSOVC). The individual dignity of clients, children, families, volunteers, and employees shall be respected and protected at all times in accordance with law.

As an employee or volunteer of CSOVC, I understand that information about clients, children, families, volunteers, or employees must not be divulged to anyone other than persons who are authorized to receive such information. I also understand that information about any CSOVC business must not be disclosed to anyone other than persons who are authorized to receive such information. This policy extends to both internal and external disclosure.

I understand that I must abide by the following rules when dealing with information about children and families:

1. All family records must be locked in a secure file.
2. Access to family records is limited to appropriate employees.
3. Family records must not be removed from the office/center.
4. Family records must never be left out on desks, tables, etc. where other people may have access to them.
5. Families' private information must never be discussed among employees except on a "need to know" basis. Employees must be particularly aware of their surroundings when discussing this information. Special caution must be taken to be sure other children, families, or employees do not overhear information, which is private.
6. Discussion of children or families' information with volunteers (unless the volunteer has a "need to know"), other families, friends, or community members is prohibited.
7. Information and documents that are considered confidential are medical records, educational records, special needs records, family records, financial records, and any other private information about the families.

I understand I must abide by the following rules when dealing with information about employees:

1. All employee records must be locked in a secure file.
2. Access to an employee's records is limited to appropriate employees.
3. An Employee's records must not be removed from the office/center.
4. An Employee's records must never be left out on desks, tables, etc., where other people may have access to them.
5. An Employee's private information must never be discussed among employees except on the "need to know" basis. Employees must be particularly aware of their surroundings when discussing this information.

Special caution must be taken to be sure other children, families, or employees do not overhear information that is private.

6. Discussion of an employee's information with volunteers, families, friends, or community members is prohibited.
7. Information and documents that are considered confidential are medical records, educational records, employment records, financial or pay records, and any other private information about the employee.
8. Under no circumstances will information be released or employment verified by telephone. All requests must be in writing.
9. Information will only be released with the express written consent of the employee.

Community Services of Venango County, Inc. respects the rights to privacy of our clients and employees. Community Services of Venango County, Inc. does not tolerate gossip. Employees who engage in gossip will be subject to disciplinary action regardless of whether the gossip is rumor or truth.

I understand that any violation of the Confidentiality Policy or the conditions contained in this Confidentiality Statement will be considered as a serious infraction of CSOVC policy and will lead to disciplinary action up to and including immediate termination of my employment.

EMPLOYEE / VOLUNTEER SIGNATURE

DATE

SUPERVISOR'S SIGNATURE

DATE

Emily Holoszy
OFFICE
MGR.

11/1/01