

ARTICLE

e-PAR

Using technology and participatory action research to engage youth in health promotion

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ABSTRACT

There is increasing interest in 'moving upstream' in youth health promotion efforts to focus on building youth self-esteem, self-efficacy and civic engagement. Participatory Action Research (PAR) can be a powerful mechanism for galvanizing youth to become active agents of this change. Engaging youth in PAR and health promotion, however, is not always an easy task. This article describes a model (e-PAR) for using technology and Participatory Action Research to engage youth in community health promotion. The e-PAR Model was developed iteratively in collaboration with 57 youth and five community partners through seven projects. The Model is designed to be used with a group of youth working with a facilitator within a youth-serving organization. In addition to outlining the theoretical basis of the e-PAR Model, this article provides an overview of how the Model was developed along with implications for practice and research.

KEY WORDS

- activism
- Community Based Participatory Research
- engagement
- health promotion
- media arts

## Introduction

There is increasing interest in ‘moving upstream’ from interventions that focus solely on changing individual health behaviors. Health promotion emphasizes a broader approach for building youth self-esteem, self-efficacy and civic engagement. Creating opportunities for youth to imagine better futures may have a larger impact in preventing binge drinking, sexual risk taking, or violent bullying than interventions that target each of these problems as single health issues. In order for this shift to take place, young people must be viewed as community assets (Checkoway, Richards-Schuster et al., 2003) that are capable of partnering in both the identification of community health issues and the development of possible solutions (Advisory Committee on Population Health, 2000; Blum, 1998; Nutbeam, 1997; UN, 2004). Participatory Action Research (PAR) can be a powerful mechanism for gathering this input and galvanizing change (Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2001; Flicker, Savan, Mildenberger, & Kolenda, 2007; Gaventa, 1993; Park, Brydon-Miller, Hall, & Jackson, 1993).

In forecasting adolescent health research trends for the new millennium, Galambos and Leadbeater (2000) and The Society for Adolescent Medicine (2003) offer a vision of young people becoming more active agents in the research process. Some of the benefits of involving youth as co-researchers include valuable youth input in research design to ensure that processes are ‘youth friendly’ and accessible, assistance in the recruitment of hard-to-reach youth through peer models, increased accessibility and community credibility, improved analysis and the development of creative peer dissemination strategies (Flicker, 2006; Harper & Carver, 1999). However, engaging youth in PAR and health promotion is not always an easy task and comes with its own set of methodological challenges (Amsden & VanWynsberghe, 2005).

We are said to be living in a digital age. The vast majority of Canadian (94%) and American (87%) youth have regular access to the Internet (Lehnhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005; Media Awareness Network, 2005). While this access is not always ideal (Skinner, Biscope, Poland, & Goldberg, 2003), increasingly youth are using technology to create and maintain social networks (Flicker et al., 2004; Montgomery, Gottlieb-Robles, & Larson, 2004) and to promote activism (Lombardo, Zakus, & Skinner, 2002). One has only to observe the use of cell phones, iPods, blogs and instant messaging to see that for many youth, technology is a seamless part of how they conduct their lives (Lehnhart et al., 2005; Lombardo et al., 2002; Montgomery et al., 2004). This technological fluency presents a unique opportunity to appeal to youth culture and engage youth in health promotion (Skinner et al., 1997).

This article describes a model (e-PAR) for using technology and Participatory Action Research to engage youth in community health promotion. The e-PAR Model was developed iteratively by the authors and other staff at the



**Figure 1** e-PAR Model

TeenNet Research Program, University of Toronto (Chen, Poland, & Skinner, 2007; Ridgley, Maley, & Skinner, 2004; Skinner, 2002) in collaboration with 57 youth and five community partners through seven projects. Founded by Dr Harvey Skinner in 1995, TeenNet is an innovative participatory research program that has pioneered the use of media technology to engage youth in health promotion and community action. TeenNet researchers collaborate locally and internationally to involve young people from diverse backgrounds in community health issue identification, community action and learning resource development. To that end, TeenNet has created several interactive health education websites (see: [www.smokingzine.org](http://www.smokingzine.org); [www.livepositive.ca](http://www.livepositive.ca)), consulted on municipal, provincial and national youth engagement strategies, and developed curricula (TIG Express HIV/AIDS, 2007) and youth activism manuals (Morrison, Lombardo, Biscope, & Skinner, 2005; Ridgley, Lombardo, Poland, & Skinner, 2005; Skinner & Biscope, 2005).

The e-PAR Model is designed to be used with a group of youth working with a facilitator within a youth-serving organization. A visual representation of the e-PAR Model is provided in Figure 1. In addition to outlining the theoretical basis of the e-PAR Model, this article will provide an overview of how the Model was developed along with implications for practice and research.

## Model in theory

Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a methodology emerged from work within developing countries (Fals-Borda & Anishur Rahman, 1991; Hall, 1993). Heavily influenced by the work of Paulo Freire among others (Freire, 1970), PAR takes an empowerment approach to social change (Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1994). PAR is premised on the notion that local communities ought to be full partners in the processes of knowledge creation and social change (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Hall, 1993; Maguire, 1987), and breaks down the distinctions between the researcher and the researched (Gaventa, 1993). PAR approaches have been used effectively to partner with youth on health promotion interventions in a variety of contexts (Boutilier, Mason, & Rootman, 1997; Cheatham & Shen, 2003; Harper & Carver, 1999; Mason, 1997; Mason & Boutilier, 1996; Poland, Tupker, & Breland, 2002).

Drawing on feminist, critical and post-modern theory to blur the distinctions between objectivity and subjectivity, participatory approaches acknowledge that communities often already have local knowledge that is crucial to understanding and addressing their own social problems. What is unique about the e-PAR Model is our approach to using technology to support this empowering practice (Goodman, 2003; Ross, 2001; Tyner, 2003; Tyner & Mokund, 2004). The use of technology as an effective strategy for engaging youth in health promotion is supported by a growing body of literature (Mitchell & Smith, 2001; Norris, 2000; Ridgley et al., 2004; Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004). The e-PAR Model defines technology as ‘youth media’ or a framework incorporating a wide range of communication tools (e.g. the Internet, photography, video and music production software) that promote community development, critical literacy, artistic expression, civic engagement and social activism.

At the crux of this model is an understanding that our world is indeed transformable, and youth can play active roles as change agents. e-PAR encourages youth to critically research their worlds using familiar youth media methodologies and then supports them in developing active strategies for change. By taking successful concrete actions towards improving their communities, youth can build their self-respect and confidence to cope with other life situations (Carroll, Hébert, & Roy, 1999) while becoming better connected with their communities and cohort (Bradley, Deighton, & Selby, 2004). Furthermore, engaging in community action projects can foster positive relationships with caring adults (Camino, 2005; Mercier, Piat, Peladeau, & Dagenais, 2002) and allow marginalized youth who have few positive outlets to feel like they can make a positive difference (Flicker, 2006; Harper & Carver, 1999).

e-PAR draws from the rich tradition of youth action guides and literature, and is premised on the notion that youths’ contributions are acknowledged and valued (Camino, 2005; Carroll et al., 1999). Youth are given multiple and varied

opportunities for self expression (Bradley et al., 2004) and are provided with the freedom to see and express their worlds using new and familiar creative technologies (Ridgley et al., 2004; Strack et al., 2004). They are given an appropriate amount of responsibility and control (Carroll et al., 1999; Hart, 1997) in the context of a safe and supportive atmosphere (Lax & Galvin, 2002; Metcalf & Humphreys, 2002). Youth are supported through a trained and trusted facilitator (Carroll et al., 1999) and an agreed upon governance structure (Levy, Baldyga, & Jurkowski, 2003). They are guided through a process of issues identification and research and then a goal for action is agreed upon and understood by all participating youth (Metcalf & Humphreys, 2002). As such the model is about engaging young people using youth media to identify, understand and describe structural and proximal issues of concern in their community and then develop action strategies for change.

### **The e-PAR Model in practice**

The e-PAR Model, while rooted in theory, was developed through practice. Between 2000 and 2004, the Model was implemented over seven times in collaboration with five youth-serving community organizations. The participating organizations included a learning organization for street-involved youth, a community centre, a drop-in centre for youth and an organization supporting LGBTQQ<sup>1</sup> immigrant youth. Each project was completed by a team of young people in collaboration with TeenNet. The youth met weekly for between four and 12 months (see Table 1). Generally, TeenNet staff approached youth-serving organizations (YSO) that worked with diverse groups of youth and asked service providers if they would be interested in partnering to test out the Model. In some instances, TeenNet staff facilitated the process, in others a co-facilitating approach with YSO staff was adopted.

Participating youth were recruited from community-based youth-serving organizations. In one case the youth were recruited from existing drop-in groups, in other cases the project was integrated into the organization's existing program planning, or was established as a new component of the community organizations' programming. Youth were paid an honorarium for project participation and were asked to commit to a specified period of time.

Funding for each of the projects had been secured prior to recruiting the youth. Youth had varying degrees of control over the projects' initial topics. Some were given a very general topic (e.g. tobacco, violence) and encouraged to identify their issues of concern (e.g. tobacco industry global ethics). Other groups were given more freedom to identify issues of concern to them (e.g. countering stereotypes of street-involvement). Regardless of where the youth started on the continuum of participation, they determined how the process unfolded and the

**Table 1** Overview of the e-PAR Model in practice for the participating projects

<i>Project</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>PAR</i>
R' View <sup>a</sup> Thirteen youth (12–14 yrs) 16 weeks	Group media: photography, issues identified include friendship/social support, body image, violence, graffiti and drugs	Action: community art exhibit and website of photos and commentary.
Neighborhood Center Youth Group <sup>b</sup> Eight youth (12–14 yrs) 16 weeks	Group media: photography, theatre, writing and music, issues identified include friendship, peer pressure and healthy decision-making	Action: created 'Smokin' a drama about youth, smoking and healthy decision-making. DVD made for distribution.
Smoke Free World (SFW) <sup>c</sup> Nine youth (14–19 yrs) 2 years	Group media: Internet and video, issue identification focused on tobacco-related issues, in particular industry global ethics	Action: developed a website, video and an interactive workshop on the globalization of tobacco. Presented their workshop to over 400 youth and adults at schools and conferences.
Perspectives of Inner City Street <sup>d</sup> Youth (PICS) Five youth (18–21 yrs) 32 weeks	Group media: photography, issues identified include stereotypes towards street youth, impact of discrimination and lack of affordable housing	Action: surveyed their local community about attitudes towards street youth. Photography and written pieces were published in a 'zine created by the youth, and online by Young People's Press. Youth participated in political rallies.
Tough Guise <sup>e</sup> 20 youth (11–15 yrs) 32 weeks	Group media: photography, issues identified include the way masculinity is portrayed in popular culture and its link to the practice of tough posing and violence among boys	Action: developed a peer violence multimedia awareness presentation, conducted school presentations.
Peace Power Group <sup>f</sup> Seven youth (19–22 yrs) 32 weeks	Group media: video, photography, drama, break dancing and music production, issues identified include surviving day-to-day as a street-involved youth, barriers to accessing support and services, poverty, homelessness, betrayal, racism, and lack of access to outlets of self-invention.	Action: created songs and music and a presentation delivered to over 700 youth and adults.

*continues*

Table 1 Cont.

<i>Project</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>PAR</i>
Rock the Boat <sup>9</sup> Seven youth (18–24 yrs) 28 months	Group media: art, drama, poetry, photography and website development, issues identified related to their recent immigration.	Action: built a website for young gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and transsexual newcomers to Canada.

*Notes:*

<sup>a</sup> partner: St. Stephan's Community House – Toronto social service agency that provides programming for youth.

<sup>b</sup> partner: Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre Toronto program for youth to develop life skills and contribute to their community.

<sup>c</sup> partner: youth were recruited from previous Toronto TeenNet youth group.

<sup>d</sup> partner: Beat the Street, is a learning center for street-involved youth in Toronto.

<sup>e</sup> partner: Regent Park Focus, a program of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto.

<sup>f</sup> partner: Beat the Street is a learning center for street-involved youth in Toronto.

<sup>9</sup> partner: Supporting Our Youth (SOY), a volunteer organization that works to improve the lives of LGBTQQ youth in Toronto.

ultimate outcomes. In all cases, the scope of the youths' participation was negotiated transparently by the facilitators at the time of recruitment.

In the initial implementations of e-PAR, Photovoice was used to engage youth (Strack et al., 2004; Wang, 2007; Wang & Burris, 1994; Wilson et al., 2007). Photovoice is a participatory methodology that allows community members to use photography technology to visually represent community health issues and create action plans for change. Photovoice is a facilitated practice whereby youth are encouraged to take pictures about how they see and understand their world. Using the acronym SHOWED they are guided through a critical discussion to reflect on their imagery. Finally, the process culminates in action planning and engaging in dialogue with decision-makers. Early on, it was clear that this approach was successful in not only engaging young people but in providing them with an innovative means of expressing themselves.

S – What do you See here?

H – What is really Happening here?

O – How does this related to Our lives?

W – Why does this problem/situation exist?

E – How can we become Empowered?

D – What can we Do about it?

In these early implementations, desktop publishing, email and word processing were used to create material to disseminate the outcomes (Powerpoint presentations, public exhibitions, websites, newsletter, etc). However, as the e-PAR Model evolved, the types of technologies employed by the groups expanded. The latter projects found youth using media such as electronic music and video production for dissemination.

This relationship with youth media became key for engaging young people who might not normally take a leadership role in health promotion outreach. For example, in one project, some youth were attracted to participate primarily to learn Acid Pro music production software. Once involved, they produced and performed songs to over 700 peers in a series of performances.

Other action projects included organizing a photography exhibit in a local restaurant, publishing articles in youth press, creating a ‘zine’,<sup>2</sup> attending rallies and developing a multimedia presentation for schools. The diversity of issues and the range of action projects reflect the youth-driven nature of the model.

Finally, youth were encouraged to continually reflect on their participation. Each group conducted regular process evaluation check-ins and impact evaluations. Impact evaluations were designed to be directly linked to the group’s selected action and provided youth with a way to determine the effect of their achievement and celebrate their successes. For example, youth groups whose action was performance-based (workshop, play) chose to use audience feedback forms, other groups whose actions culminated in web exhibits or essays used online feedback surveys to assess their impact.

## **Case study descriptions**

### **‘Rock the Boat’ (<http://www.RocktheBoat.ca>)**

SOY (Supporting Our Youth) is a Toronto-based organization dedicated to improving the quality of life of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual and transgender youth. As a major immigration hub (50% of Toronto residents are born in other countries), known for its liberal social policies, Toronto hosts an increasing number of LGBTQQ youth who are experiencing the challenges of migration. SOY was interested in supporting refugee, newcomer, immigrant and non-status youth to explore these issues. Seven youth, between the ages of 18 and 24 years who had emigrated within the last five years from Indonesia, the Caribbean, Ethiopia, Egypt and Pakistan participated.

Through the use of Photovoice and other self-reflexive practices, the group identified several issues that related to their migration experience: being gay, lesbian or bisexual, being young, challenges of culture and homosexuality, experiences of racism in gay mainstream society and society at large, isolation,

awareness and acceptance of own communities and the need to bring communities together.

From these issues, the group determined their project objective: to create a website ([www.RocktheBoat.ca](http://www.RocktheBoat.ca)) that would educate LGBTQ youth about the social, fun and entertaining side to living in Toronto, Canada, as well as give support and provide resources to legal and social services. The youth identified that resources were important so that LGBTQ newcomer youth and youth who live outside Canada have a place to connect online, share multimedia arts, accurate immigration information, services and social places in Toronto. They also stated strongly that the use of their website could be an activist tool to support and mobilize young people.

The name *Rock the Boat* came from a play on the term ‘fresh off the boat’, which is a slang insult applied to newcomers to English-speaking countries. The comment implies that these newcomers are ignorant about the complexities of life in a modern city. Therefore, *Rock the Boat* implies an active, engaged newcomer who is not going to conform to this stereotype and will rebel strongly against it. Although funding has ended for this initiative, the youth have decided to incorporate the maintenance of the website into an existing SOY drop-in social group. Other youth have indicated an interest in learning more about the project and contributing materials. As such, the youth in the original group have had a chance to take on peer leadership roles as young people experienced in research and knowledge exchange practices.

### **Smoke Free World (<http://www.smokefreeworld.org>)**

We are a group of teens on a mission, a total expedition, battling tobacco and its foolish composition.

As part of a grant to address issues around adolescent smoking, youth were recruited from a variety of social service organizations to investigate and help us think about teen smoking. In order to research the issues, the group engaged in a Photovoice project, critical reflection and a great deal of Internet research. They decided that rather than focusing on individual smoking or cessation, they were more interested in environmental and social justice issues. Over the course of two years, the team examined a wide range of international tobacco issues such as international marketing to women and children, the economic impact of tobacco and the use of western images to promote tobacco sales overseas.

In order to take action on these issues, they developed a website, several public service announcements that aired on television and online and an interactive youth-focused workshop that they have presented at various schools and youth conferences to over 500 peers.

Smoke Free World continue to meet occasionally (several years later) and

have credited their experience mobilizing around issues of tobacco for helping them to become more actively engaged in their community.

### **Peace Power**

A group of young people at Beat the Street (a local literacy program that works with street-involved youth) used music production software to create songs and music about topics they identified as important to them.

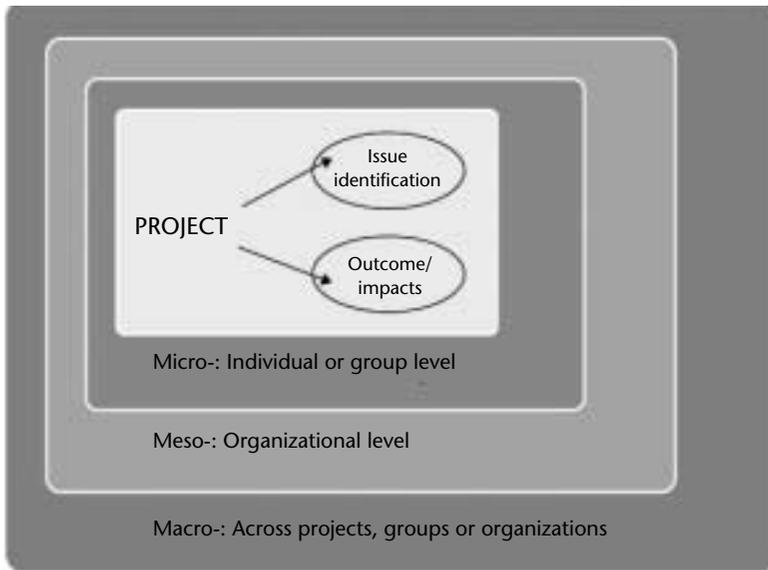
Some of the issues identified by the group included surviving day-to-day as a street-involved youth, barriers to accessing support and services, poverty, homelessness, betrayal, racism and lack of access to outlets of self-invention. When developing what message the group wanted to communicate to their youth audiences they focused on the positive: Chase your Dreams; Develop Yourself; and Widen your Perspective.

The group participated in several workshops to assist them in focusing their issues, building skills and expressing themselves in different ways. The ultimate goal was to build a dynamic show. In addition to in-depth learning of Acid Pro music production software, the group learned about lyric writing and song construction, and participated in breakdancing and a video production workshop. They also participated in a Forum Theatre Workshop. This assisted them in building the content and approach of their performances. The youth also spent two weeks with Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography learning about photography with a focus on taking pictures that reflected the lyrical and thematic content of their music. Gallery 44 is a non-profit artist-run centre in Toronto.

The Peace Power group did 15 performances in total, presenting to over 700 youth and adults in a variety of settings, including the Sixth Blue Metropolis Montreal International Literary Festival, April 2004. The group also got the 2003 Youth Advocate Award for Innovation from the City of Toronto.

### **Reflecting on quality**

e-PAR as a practice is about supporting youth and youth-serving agencies in critical knowledge generation and activism. Critical to the process is reflecting on validity. Bradbury and Reason (2001) have suggested a number of ‘choice-points’ for discussion including: ‘quality as relational praxis’, ‘quality as reflexive-practical outcome’, ‘quality as plurality of knowing’, ‘quality as engaging in significant work’ and ‘emergent inquiry towards enduring consequence’. In describing the case studies above, we hope we have provided the reader with enough detail to get a sense of the ways in which we tried to foster youth development, critical knowledge production, respect for a diversity of knowledge gener-



**Figure 2** Evaluating e-PAR

ation approaches and ways of knowing, empowerment and leadership training and support. Another way of framing these issues might be to look at the ways in which we evaluate e-PAR on multiple levels (see Figure 2).

- Individual
- Micro-: impact on the individual and/or individual youth group
- Meso-: impact on the community organization
- Macro-: impact across projects, groups and/or organizations.

At the project level, youth groups usually use evaluation or research methodologies at two points. As discussed previously, youth assume the role of researcher when identifying and articulating key issues in their lives and their community. Evaluation or research methodologies can support this process. Similarly, the youth groups can use research and evaluation methodologies to assess the impact of their chosen action. For example, the Perspective of Inner City Street Youth (PICS) youth wanted to raise awareness and open the minds of community members to the hidden realities of street life. To better understand how the community viewed street life, the youth created a survey and administered it to pedestrians at various downtown locations in Toronto. Based on their own experiences and the survey findings, the PICS youth wrote and published an article series that explored stereotypes towards street youth, particularly the impact of discrimination, housing and society's views of street youth. Their photography and written pieces were published online by Young People's Press and through a print and online 'zine ([www.globalyouthvoices.org/youth\\_action\\_](http://www.globalyouthvoices.org/youth_action_)

beat.html). To then gain some measure of impact, the PICS youth developed and implemented an online feedback survey. The survey was implemented during the two months the articles were featured on the Young People's Press website. Of the 73 people who completed the survey during that time period, 68 percent were significantly inspired to help street youth after reading the articles.

At the micro-level, evaluation is conducted to determine the impact of the e-PAR process on the individual youth and youth groups. As part of implementing e-PAR, organization staff, for example, are encouraged to establish individual and group indicators of success with the participating youth. These indicators are an important way to identify achievements that result from working together on an action project. For example, high attendance at group meetings can be a measure of successful group functioning. Youth may also want to construct their own evaluation to understand the impact of participation. For example, a group of youth from the Tough Guise youth project designed and implemented their own outcome evaluation. Among their findings was the identification of the value of reflection. As one youth stated, 'when you are with a group, sometimes they will show you [something] that you might have missed and that you wouldn't have done by yourself'.

As part of the action research process used to develop and refine the e-PAR Model, the authors used the micro-level evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the e-PAR Model at engaging youth. Surveys and focus groups, for example, were conducted with the participating PICS youth after the completion of each stage of the e-PAR Model. Questions were constructed to measure youth engagement in and satisfaction with the e-PAR process, as well the impact on youth's sense of personal empowerment and community connection. Analysis indicated that e-PAR facilitated feelings of authentic participation in the youth group and a sense of ownership over the project. The youth also developed new understandings about their place and potential power within their communities. They indicated a desire to educate and develop understanding within their community, not just for their personal gain or the strength of the group but also for the benefit the community.

At the meso-level, evaluation focuses on the impact of the e-PAR Model on the community organization. For community organizations who implement e-PAR, it is useful to reflect on how effective, for example, the organization was in supporting the youth action project and, more broadly, how well the organization supports youth engagement. For instance, to ensure that Rock the Boat could continue and develop, the group's activities were integrated with other SOY agency programs.

The authors also studied the organizational experiences as the youth groups moved through the e-PAR process in order to identify those structures and resources needed to support and sustain the e-PAR Model within a community organization. The opportunity to interact with and learn about new media

(photography, web-design, music software) was a big draw for many of the youth engaged. Issues specifically related to the use of technology (e.g. required skill) were studied, including the role of technology in promoting youth engagement and ownership through the e-PAR process. For example, the Peace Power group expressed that using the medium of music technology enabled them to communicate their thoughts and feelings in a way that they felt would be heard. This technology also allowed them to disseminate their messages in spaces where the voices of street-involved youth are not often heard. While having a facilitator that has the technological skills may not always be possible, it is important to note that in the evaluation research conducted by TeenNet, youth overwhelmingly stated that having a facilitator who can work well with youth (e.g. trust, respect and support youth) was more important than technological skill.

At the macro-level, evaluation encourages the youth serving organizations who have implemented multiple action projects to reflect on that experience. Similar to evaluation at the meso-level, these organizations may want to reflect on how the e-PAR action projects have contributed to the organization and the broader community, and how, indeed if, the e-PAR Model integrates with the organization's philosophical and operational approach. Macro-level evaluation as part of the action research process enabled the authors to identify commonalities across different implementation of e-PAR. These findings were then used to refine and enhance the e-PAR Model in subsequent iterations.

The reflection, evaluation or research at different times and at different levels that is built into the e-PAR Model, not only reflect the rigor with which e-PAR was developed but also ensures that the e-PAR process can adapt to the realities and personalities of those community organizations and youth who undertake an action project.

## **Discussion**

Through implementing the e-PAR Model in over seven projects, the TeenNet Research Program has learned a great deal about the challenges of linking youth participation with technology. Many of these challenges informed and improved the Model. These critical factors are outlined below.

Context plays a significant role in how youth participation is implemented. Available funding, organization policies and the skills and abilities of the participating youth and facilitators all contribute to the environment within which participation occurs. The key to authentic youth participation is not to deny these environmental factors but to encourage transparent and open dialogue with the youth. Too often, adults underestimate the ability of youth to understand and negotiate boundaries (Checkoway, Dobbie, & Richards-Schuster, 2003; Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2001; Checkoway, Richards-Schuster et al.,

2003). For instance, when youth are paid for their participation, sometimes conflict can arise if some youth feel that others are not ‘pulling their weight’. Being clear about the total overall budget and seeking youth input into what would be the most equitable strategy for recognizing work may be one strategy to help develop ground-rules that all feel are ‘fair’.

At the same time participation is not static. As youth develop trust with an organization or facilitator, and in their own skills and abilities, they will most likely demand increased control and participation. Power relations do not simply evaporate in participatory research projects. Rather, they all too often come to the fore. Naming the dynamics of inequities and working towards minimizing them is at the root of the participatory process (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003). This can often be a difficult task, especially when working with minors. Nevertheless, the very process of modeling power-sharing in these ventures can provide young people with an opportunity to imagine and enact more equitable social relation norms.

Facilitating a youth group where technology is combined with participatory methods would seem to require an advanced skill set: the ability to use the technology, the ability to work with youth, a solid understanding of community health issues and to have knowledge of research techniques. The reality is somewhat gentler. It is more important for a facilitator to acknowledge their skill base – its strengths and deficiencies – and to approach working with youth as an opportunity to both learn and support. We were often amazed and impressed with what youth already knew and could teach their peers and us.

Our model in practice supports growing recognition amongst researchers, educators and policy organizations like UNESCO, of the potential for learning through media arts technologies. In particular media arts projects are tools for helping youth gain expanded understandings of themselves and others (UNESCO, 2005). By encouraging creativity and personal expression, youth media projects promote self-awareness, empathy and critical dialogue. This focus on the transformative nature of youth media directly honors the action-oriented goals of PAR.

Although the e-PAR Model is a work in progress, it does provide an important step in linking participatory action research with the rapidly evolving field of youth media, resulting in positive youth experiences in community action. Furthermore, the e-PAR Model may be a powerful example of how we can begin to move upstream in adolescent health approaches. For those interested in applying this model to their own local contexts, please see our practitioner-friendly ‘how to’ guides (Morrison et al., 2005; Ridgley et al., 2005; Skinner & Biscope, 2005) at [www.globalyouthvoices.org](http://www.globalyouthvoices.org). Currently, investigators are applying the model to international contexts in Kenya, Mozambique, Vietnam, Slovenia, Egypt, Israel and Palestine.

Photography, web-software, online surveys, music software, video and

other technologies were used as both data collection and dissemination strategies in the development of our model. Each media has its own set of strengths, limitations, costs and necessary skills associated with start-up. Those interested in attempting to facilitate similar processes may enjoy the relative ease of newer free-ware web-environments such as MySpace, Facebook, Flickr, Wikis and YouTube which facilitate the sharing and networking of information. The possibilities are truly endless. The key is to find and negotiate the media that will work best within each context to inspire engagement and critical reflection while balancing staffing, available hardware, software, other resources and youth talent, skills and desires.

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## Notes

- 1 Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transitioning, questioning and queer youth
- 2 'zine: derived from *magazine* – is an independently or self-published booklet. 'A small amateur publication usually produced out of passion, rarely making a profit or breaking even' (*Wired*, 1995).

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