

TITLE: Applying critical discourse analysis to the study of public health policy

AUTHOR(S): Molly Campbell

PRESENTER(S): Molly Campbell

STUDENT SUBMISSION: Yes

TOPIC/TARGET AUDIENCE: Policy makers, policy analysts, policy researchers

ABSTRACT: The movement towards health equity requires troubling and transforming our existing systems of power and public policymaking. However, exactly how to critically analyze and restructure policy remains a challenge. Critical Discourse Analysis offers a way to consider ideational power, a type of power expressed through the conceptualization and naming of social problems and solutions. This method considers not only the policy language, but also the broader sociopolitical and structural context in which the policy exists. The purpose of this presentation is to describe the method of Critical Discourse Analysis and introduce the audience to analytic strategies from the field of linguistics that can be applied to the study of public policy. Using an Oregon Medicaid policy document as an example, we will explore semantic macrostructure, topicalization, presupposition, the omission of agents through nominalization and passive sentence construction, connotation, metaphor, modality, and intertextuality. Through deconstructing policy discourse, we reveal hegemonic ideologies and unequal power relations contained in policy texts. Beyond criticism, we can also use this careful attention to language to create policies that equitably redistribute power and resources.

OBJECTIVE(S): Describe discourse analysis strategies relevant to the study of public policy. Analyze a policy document using strategies from the field of linguistics
