

SCHOLARSHIP, PRAXIS, AND SOCIAL CHANGES: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Professor: (Shu-Ju) Ada Cheng
Undergraduate/graduate combined course
Sociology/Women's Studies/International Studies
Meeting Time: TH 5: 45 – 9 PM
Meeting Location: LPC
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Introduction:

As a sequence to Qualitative Methods class, this course focuses specifically on participatory action research. Participatory action research, also known as PAR, is becoming increasingly popular for social sciences disciplines. PAR, with its inherent emphasis on an equal relationship between the researcher and the researched, emphasizes the importance of respecting the situated knowledge of research participants. This method, unshackled from the dogma of positivism and its illusion of “neutrality” and “detachment” in research process, stresses the significance of working with community organizations and working toward social changes. In other words, rather than staying isolated and comfortable in the ivory tower, researchers will link scholarship, praxis, and social changes as all essential components of their research projects. Fundamentally, knowledge for what and studying with become central concerns for research. It is important to note that PAR has always been part of the discipline of sociology, even though it has been devalued and marginalized. In this class, we will excavate this particular history and trace the pioneer work of PAR/activist sociologists. In addition, we will learn the history and intellectual foundation of PAR. We will work with select community organizations here in Chicago and conduct ethnography, including participant observation and in-depth interviews. The purpose of the research is concerned with urgent issues in the communities under study. The goal of the research is to engage in activism with community members. Through this class, we will familiarize ourselves with the literature in PAR and ultimately contribute to social changes.

Texts:

- Ethnography Unbound (Part V)
- Liberation Sociology (Chapter V-VII)
- Nurtured by Knowledge: Learning to Do Participatory Action-Research
- Pedagogy of the Oppressed
- Streets of Hope: The Fall and Rise of an Urban Neighborhood
- Collection of articles (handouts in class)

Community Organizations:

The organizations we will be working with in this class include the following (tentative):

- Coalition of African, Asian, European & Latino Immigrants
- South East Asian Center

- North Central District Health Center
- Albany Park Community Center

(Note to faculty members: These organizations are listed simply for the sake of this draft. Having given this course much thought, I think the best way is to incorporate students into my own research projects. In other words, the organizations listed above are those with whom I will be work for my own research. My main concern for working with community organization is the lack of consistency and coherence. Working with community organizations based on class schedule would seem to create more disruption and intrusion and border on exploitation. Incorporating students in my project and allowing them to engage with organizations already included in my project seem to guarantee more mutual benefits and serve the interests of both parties.)

Grading:

There won't be any exams for this class. The grading is mainly based on class discussions, volunteer commitments, written assignments, and group presentations.

- Weekly written assignments (six weeks of field notes: 30%): You need to submit weekly field notes from week IV to week IX to discuss your experiences and reflections of participant observations and in-depth interviews. The expectation of weekly written assignments is discussed below.
- Volunteer work as participant observation (30%): You are to do volunteer work at the community organization of your choice at least two hours a week. The volunteer work can include attending community events or any other type of community activities. You can use these volunteer opportunities for participant observations. The guideline for participant observation is listed on the last page of the syllabus.
- In-depth Interviews (20%): You are to conduct at least two in-depth interviews each week. Each interview should last around an hour to an hour and a half depending on interview situations.
- Group projects (20%): You are to present your group projects the last day of the class. The focus of the presentation is discussed below.

SCHEDULED PROGRESS, READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS

Week I: Overview: Participatory Action Research and the Tradition of Activist Sociology

In class: Introductory lecture (reviews of history and philosophy of participatory action research)

Week II: Ethics of Participatory Action Research: Identity, Power, and Ethical Concerns

Readings: Liberation Sociology (Feagin & Vera, Chapter 5-Chapter 7)
 Education, Research, and Action: Theory and Methods of Participatory Action
 Research (Brydon-Miller)
 Handouts

In class: Discussion of reading materials

Week III: Working with and Empowering Community Organizations

Readings: Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire)
Deepening Participatory Action-Research (Smith, Nurtured by Knowledge)
Participatory Action-Research within the Global Context (Smith, Nurtured by Knowledge)

In class: Representatives from community organizations will come to the class to talk about the history of their agencies, their services, and urgent issues for research and actions.

Discussion of reading materials

Week IV: Visiting Field Sites, Identifying Issues, and Strategies of Inquiry

Readings: Community Participatory Action Research as a Strategy for Improving Universities and the social Sciences (Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett)
"Help from within: Participatory Research in a Low-Income Neighborhood (Curtis)
"You Start Your Research on Your Being" (Williams, Nurtured by Knowledge)

Assignments: Write up field notes for visiting communities and organizations and describe issues and concerns in need of research action. Provide research design with an emphasis on strategies of inquiry. For your research design, please discuss why you decide to specifically focus on certain issues, how you plan to go about collecting data, and what methods you will utilize for the research. In addition, please provide a questionnaire for in-depth interviews.

In class: Discussion of field experiences and reading materials
Interview practices (oral history, in-depth interviews, etc.)

Week V: Fieldwork I (Participant Observation & Preliminary Interviews)

Readings: Ethnography Unbound (Buraway et al., Part V/Chapter 11-14)

Assignments: Write up field notes for participant observations and in-depth interviews. If possible, try to find a community member who can give you a history of the neighborhood development and conduct an oral history with him/her. Please use the interviews in this week as a trial to see if questions work. Please revise questions as you see fit.

In class: Discussion of field experiences and reading materials

Week VI: Fieldwork II (Participant Observation & In-depth Interviews)

Readings: Cow for Campensinos (Debbink & Ornelas, Nurtured by Knowledge)
Changing Disabling Environments through Participatory Action Research: A Canadian Experience (Law, Nurtured by Knowledge)
"We Are Dying. It Is Finished.!: Linking and Ethnographic Research Design to an HIV/AIDS participatory approach in Uganda (Spittal & Nakuti, Nurtured by Knowledge)

Assignments: Write up field notes for participant observations, in-depth interviews, and personal reflections on research process.

In class: Discussion of field experiences and reading materials

Week VII: *Fieldwork III (Participant Observations and In-depth Interviews)*

Readings: Grounding a Long-Term Ideal: Working with the Aymara for community development (Arratia & de la Maza, Nurtured by Knowledge)
Pasantias and social Participation: Participatory Action-Research as a Way of Life (Ornelas, Nurtured by Knowledge)

Assignments: Write up field notes for participant observations, in-depth interviews, and personal reflections.

In class: Discussion of field experiences and reading materials

Week VIII: *Fieldwork IV (Participant Observation and In-depth Interviews)*

Readings: Streets of Hope: The Fall and Rise of an Urban Neighborhood (Medoff and Sklar)

Assignments: Write up field notes for participant observations, in-depth interviews, and personal reflections.

In class: Discussion of field experiences and reading materials

Week IX: *Research Analysis and Proposals for Actions*

Readings: Streets of Hope: The Fall and Rise of an Urban Neighborhood (Medoff & Sklar)

Assignments: Provide an in-depth analysis of research projects and propose viable actions to address community concerns.

In class: Discussion of field experiences and reading materials

Week X: *Group Presentations*

Each group will give a talk (twenty minutes maximum) on its project. The content of presentation should include:

- Communities and issues under study
- Strategies of inquiry (research design, methods, and fieldwork)
- Reflections of research process
- Proposal for actions

Guidelines for Participant Observation:

- I. When you conduct the participant observation, please be as observant as you can be about your surroundings. For example, what is happening? What sounds do you hear? What do you see or smell? Who is talking and what their conversations are about? What is the physical environment is like? How might the physical environment affect people? What is the setting like? You also need to be reflexive about what draws your attention and think about the reasons behind it.
- II. Question I: Why did you decide to choose this location, event, or gathering for participant observation? Why is it important to you?
- III. Question II: Please describe your observation. When you describe what you observe, assume that I have no knowledge about it. Your job is to give me a sense of the event, gathering or ceremony, through your lens of course. You will be the one to decide what to include.
- IV. Question III: If you are to study this gathering, location, or event, what issue might you want to focus on? Why?
- V. Question IV: How would you go about understanding the issue? What methods would you deploy?
- VI. Question V: You are to interview subjects and ask questions, what questions would you ask? Why are these questions important?