George Mason University
College of Education and Human Development
PhD Program

EDRS 833, Participatory Action Research
3 credits
Summer Session B (June 5 – July 29, 2017)
Fairfax Campus

Faculty
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Prerequisite:
EDRS 812, contact instructor for additional information.

University Catalog Course Description:
Explores theoretical concepts associated with participatory action research and teaches how to apply participatory data collection and analysis procedures in educational research.

Course Overview:
This graduate advanced level research course focuses on a qualitative approach to inquiry that actively engages participants in confronting and changing their life situations or patterns. It is community based in that it engages with already existing communities privileging the terms, interests, complexities and challenges of the communities themselves.

Action research, often attributed to the work of Lewin who was concerned about the psychological effects of "minority" social life on individual members of those communities, is specifically aimed at involving people in solving their own community challenges by coming to better understand those challenges and their own place in them (Freire also emphasized this in his pedagogy of the oppressed) as well as the potential for change and action. Participatory action research brings together concepts of research, learning, and change. Action research aims for democratic, inclusive, equal practices with goals to better the lives of people involved in ways that honor and privilege their experiences, perspectives, and efforts.

In this class you will learn foundational history and principles associated with action research, with an emphasis on the epistemology, ethics, and practice of critical participatory action research. In the critical tradition, research works best when it is open to critiquing inequity in its findings, research practices, relationships, and purposes. It is not a neutral way of approaching research nor does it enact a hierarchy of expertise with the researcher at the top. You will engage in reading and discussions as well as the conduct of an action research project. Through these means, you will come to your own understanding of and appreciation for practitioner-centered research known as PAR.

PAR "is concerned with efficacy and must answer to the participants, whose current welfare is at stake. Participatory Action Research is inscribed within the temporality of a life and its immediate needs, lending this research an urgency, particularly when at-risk populations are involved and during periods of economic crisis or political change, with all their attendant feelings of insecurity" Hajdukowasid-Ahmed. M. (1998). Bakhtin without borders: Participatory research in the social sciences. *The South Atlantic Quarterly, 97*(3/4), p.667.

Course Delivery Method:
This course will be delivered using seminar and fieldwork formats. Some online work may be included.

Learner Objectives:
This course is designed to enable students to do the following:
1. Articulate the historical and theoretical foundations of participatory action research;
2. Describe the common characteristics of participatory action research;
3. Discuss common practices associated with designing participatory action research studies;
4. Outline ethical considerations common to the participatory action research process;
5. Describe the various types of data collected in participatory action research studies;
6. Create a participatory action research study;
7. Carry out participatory/collaborative fieldwork, including multiple forms of data collection (such as visual, media-based, or narrative);
8. Carry out participatory/collaborative data analysis;
9. Describe ethical issues related to representation and writing up findings in participatory action research.

Required Texts:
There is one required textbook for this course:
- Fals Borda, O. & Rahman, M. A. (1991). *Action and knowledge: breaking the monopoly with participatory action-research*. New York: Apex.

Any other required readings will be posted as pdf files on Blackboard or will be handed out as hard copies in class.

Course Performance Evaluation
Students are expected to submit all assignments on time in the manner outlined by the instructor (e.g., Blackboard, Tk20, hard copy).

As an 800-level course, this course requires a significant time commitment. First, this is a **reading intensive course.** Thus, please plan accordingly, as the readings have been carefully selected to support your growth as a critical participatory action researcher. Second, the **fieldwork project does require a significant amount of time**, particularly as I encourage you to pursue this assignment with care and thoughtful reflection. Throughout the course, know that I will be here to support you and facilitate the learning process! My intent is to make this a truly meaningful learning (and growing) experience.

In all of your assignments, I am looking for evidence of: (1) understanding and the application of the concepts and processes learned and discussed in class and online; (2) critical reflection and responses to issues and concepts; (3) clarity of expression; (4) explicit connections among ideas; and (5) complete work with no grammatical or spelling errors. Incompletes and Withdrawals are strongly discouraged and are only given when the conditions of the university are met and after a conference with the instructor at the initiation of the student.

Assignments	Points
1. Participation	20
2. Research Project Portfolio	60
a. Final Portfolio:	40
b. Self-evaluation:	5
c. Methodological reflection journals:	15
3. Final manuscript	20
	100 total points

Participation:
Participation and attendance will comprise 20% of your grade. In keeping with the underlying epistemological commitments of participatory action research, this grade will ultimately be assigned through a process of consensus.

There are four areas for you to document your participation. I intend for there to be some flexibility in the sense that each class member will establish how to develop her or participation across the four areas.
1. One can attain credit by participating electronically through email or forum postings to share materials, insights, facilitate discussions and so forth, attending out-of-class lectures and sending a synopsis to classmates, and so forth. The idea here is that there are things that can be done outside of class which can contribute to the learning process.
2. One can also earn participation credit for in-class activities, like volunteering, sharing insights that extend the readings, being well-prepared, articulating counter and diverse perspectives, augmenting the readings with outside experience, texts, popular media, and other relevant opportunities to increase and deepen our understanding.
3. One can also attain class participation credit for attending class fully.
4. One can also attain class participation by integrating the field work into the class discussions, whether online or face-to-face so that the field work becomes an important element of one's class participation. Bringing in examples from your fieldwork, sharing transcripts or other research projects along the way, and presenting the final project are examples of ways to engage in the class through the project. Additionally, you can serve as a peer debriefer for classmates, provide feedback, challenges, and praise to classmates regarding their fieldwork as a way to participate in the class.

In keeping with the underlying epistemological commitments of participatory action research, each person will be expected to decide the weight of the 20 points across the four categories with at least 1 point being designated to each of the four categories. You will be asked to complete

self-evaluations on your class participation and thus you will have say in this portion of your grade. If you and I disagree, we will meet to reach consensus.

Research Project Portfolio:
The research project portfolio in total will comprise 60% of your grade. Each class member will be responsible for engaging with one action research project. These are the options:
1. Work independently on your own action research project.
2. Work with an advanced student on a cooperative action research project.
3. Work on a project with me as an apprentice.
4. Work on a project with a partner who is also enrolled in this course.

Action research is an engaged participatory methodology and so its conduct always depends on the involvement and availability of others. It is process oriented and the process cannot be easily rushed. For this reason, we will want to begin thinking of a <u>small scale</u> action research project doable in a short amount of time.

OPTION (1) WORKING INDEPENDENTLY.
This is a great option to choose if you have already taken a number of research courses, if you have connections with a community already and are able to get started quickly.

OPTION (2) WORKING WITH AN ADVANCED STUDENT ON HIS OR HER PROJECT.
This is a good option if you are more of a novice at research and have an interest in working alongside, helping out, and engaging with research that has been coordinated by a more advanced student in the class. The more advanced student will serve as project director. I might be able to steer you to some projects. I know of several possibilities for participatory action research projects.

OPTION (3) APPRENTICING WITH ME
I will discuss my idea for a PAR project on the first day of class.

OPTION (4) WORKING WITH A PARTNER
This option allows you to work with another classmate on a project. I can help you find people who might be interested in a similar topic.

Requirements:
1. <u>Final Portfolio (40 points):</u> You must document the research process, engage reflexively through a consistent journal (recording at least once weekly during the course – see below), provide the data and the analysis, and a community action plan. It is also required that you attend and participate in the preparation for the final presentation of our class' work/findings. The date for this is to be determined.
2. <u>Self-Evaluation (5 points):</u> You will complete a self-evaluation form related to the project. If the project you are participating in is group-oriented then each individual member will complete a group-evaluation form instead.
3. <u>Methodological Reflection Journals (15 points):</u> As part of the course you will be required to keep a weekly online journal reflecting on the PAR process and on the methodology itself, including questions, ethical concerns, etc. This should not be a

performance of brilliance, but rather a deep engagement in sincere reflection. You may choose to keep these on the Blackboard site for all your peers to have access, or via another method to share only with me, the instructor. Weekly prompts will be provided.

Final Manuscript:
The culminating assignment for the course is a manuscript that will be written as if to be published in a peer-reviewed journal. You will need to research the type of journal you would submit the manuscript to and then write for that audience, in that required style, etc. The manuscript will be written around learning an aspect of PAR theory through practice. For example, learning participation through practice; learning validity through practice; learning ethics through practice; etc. While you will not be required to actually submit the manuscript to a journal, you may choose to work with me and other students on a special issue of a journal or on an edited book volume after the completion of the course (this aspect is totally voluntary and we will talk more about our approach in class).

Course Performance Evaluation Weighting:
The following is the grading scale. As noted above, your final grade is based on the number of points you earn throughout the semester.

Grading Scale
A   93% - 100%
A-   90% – 92.9%
B+   87% - 89.9%
B   83% - 86.9%
B-   80% - 82.9%
C+   77% - 79.9%
C   74% - 76.9%
C-   70% - 73.9%
D+   67% - 69.9%
D   64% - 66.9%
D-   60% - 63.9%
F   0% - 59.9%

Professional Dispositions
Students are expected to exhibit professional behaviors and dispositions at all times.

Core Values Commitment
The College of Education & Human Development is committed to collaboration, ethical leadership, innovation, research-based practice, and social justice. Students are expected to adhere to these principles: **http://cehd.gmu.edu/values/**

GMU Policies and Resources for Students
Policies
- Students must adhere to the guidelines of the Mason Honor Code
  (see http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code/).

- Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing (see
- http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/).
- Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their Mason email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account.
- Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with George Mason University Disability Services. Approved accommodations will begin at the time the written letter from Disability Services is received by the instructor (see http://ods.gmu.edu/).
- Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be silenced during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.

Campus Resources
- Support for submission of assignments to Tk20 should be directed to tk20help@gmu.edu or https://cehd.gmu.edu/api/tk20. Questions or concerns regarding use of Blackboard should be directed to http://coursessupport.gmu.edu/.
- The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing (see http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/).
- The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance (see http://caps.gmu.edu/).
- The George Mason University Office of Student Support staff helps students negotiate life situations by connecting them with appropriate campus and off-campus resources. Students in need of these services may contact the office by phone (703-993-5376). Concerned students, faculty and staff may also make a referral to express concern for the safety or well-being of a Mason student or the community by going to http://studentsupport.gmu.edu/, and the OSS staff will follow up with the student.

For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, please visit our website https://cehd.gmu.edu/.

Class Schedule

Date	Topic	Readings	The Research Project	PAR Phase	Reflection Journal Prompt
June 6	Critical Participatory Action Research Theory Introducing the course, making initial fieldwork and manuscript decisions and plans	Fals-Borda (1987) Fals-Borda and Rahman chapters 1-3 Santos			Reflect on the epistemologies that underlie CPAR. Why engage in CPAR? What is the promise of CPAR?
June 8	Critical Participatory Action Research Process	Kemmis and McTaggart Freire Fourth letter Dodson and Schmalzbauer (2005) Sohng		**PLAN** The plan phase includes identifying needs and recommending actions and preparing to take action.	
June 13	Getting Started: Insider/Outsider, inclusion dynamics, ethics of entering the field Facilitating the identification of problem or interest	Allen (2012) Bensimon et al (2004) Kuriloff et al (2011) Randall (2012)	Identify project and make contact or prepare to make contact with the community		What are your concerns about engaging in CPAR? What power issues do you foresee in your project? How might you mitigate these? What other ethical concerns do you have specific to your project?
June 15	More on getting started: identifying stakeholders, key informants; identifying and dealing with power structures; engaging ethically and reflexively	Ponic et al (2010) Torre (2008) Tuck (2008)	Determine how your community action board will operate; make power issues transparent.		
June 20	Research with children/Youth Participatory Action Research	Harwood (2010) Cammarota and Romero (2010) Fals-Borda and	Facilitate community identification of a problem		Reflect on your entry into the field and on building

		Rahman Chapter 5	or concern.		relationships with the community with which you'll engage. Reflect on this related to your project and then more broadly.
June 22	Textual Methods of Data Collection	Chiu (2003) Shager (2007)	Make data collection decisions with stakeholders	**ACT** The action phase involves implementing change which at this point would include the use of PAR as a change.	
June 27	Visual Methods of Data Collection	Wang (1999) Young and Barrett (2001) Didkowsky et al (2010)	Train or otherwise prepare for data collection		Reflect on collaborative data collection.
June 29	Multimedia and Electronic Methods of Data Collection	Mobile Voices action research Lui (1995)	Data collection.	**OBSERVE** The observation phase is the phase where the situation is described and data are collected.	
July 4	No class meeting: Independence Day				
July 6	No class meeting		Data collection.		
July 11	Introduction to Data Analysis	Review favorite empirical article so far to suss out the analytic process.	Reflection. Determine approach to data analysis.		Return to your initial journals – what answers do you now have that you didn't before? Questions? Concerns?
July 13	Consciousness-raising and Data Analysis	Korth (2002)	Data Analysis		
July 18	Collaborative Data Analysis	Goto (2010) Curry (2012) Knoester (2010) Nind (2011)	Reflection	**REFLECT** The reflection phase is when analysis occurs and reflection on analysis, including the drawing of conclusions is completed.	Reflect on collaborative data analysis.
July 20	Returning analysis and conclusions to the community	Mack (2012) Fals-Borda, Chapters 6, 8			
July 25	The PAR cycle	Fals-Borda and Rahman Chapters, 7, 11 Dold and	Plan/Action with Community Share findings	**PLAN** The planning phase returns now to	

		Chapman 2011	with the community	recommending new actions and planning change.	
July 27	Sharing our research with one another; reflecting on the process.	Rajaram (2007)	Workshopping manuscripts. Submit final portfolio.	**ACT** The action phase at this point involves implementing change through new ways of acting.	Reflect on exiting the field, representation issues, and ethical dilemmas related to presentation of findings.
TBD	Presentation of findings/plan of action to community		Submit final manuscript.		

Note: Faculty reserves the right to alter the schedule as necessary, with notification to students.