

11.236 Participatory Action Research (PAR) 1

Fall 2017

Tuesdays and Thursdays from 5:00 to 6:30 PM in 9-451

Prerequisite: Permission of the instructors

Units: 3-0-3

Instructors

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STELLAR SITE:

<http://stellar.mit.edu/S/course/11/fa17/11.236/>

First class will meet on Thursday, September 7, 2017. The class will run for six weeks.

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course introduces students to Participatory Action Research (PAR), which is an approach to research and inquiry that enables communities to examine and address consequential societal problems. In bringing together community researchers and academics to investigate a consequential social problem and determine what ought to be done, PAR seeks to transform existing unequal power relationships between marginalized groups and those traditionally considered “expert” researchers. This six-week module will explore theoretical and practical questions at the heart of partnerships between applied social scientists and community partners. Our focus includes: the history of PAR and Action Research; debates regarding PAR as a form of applied social science; and practical, political, and ethical questions in the practice of PAR. Students will be guided through an iterative process for developing their own personal theories of practice.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class meetings: The class will meet for 1.5 hours every Tuesday and Thursday from 5:00 to 6:30 PM from September 7th through October 19th. Students are expected to attend all class sessions and participate actively in class discussions and activities.

Reading Assignments: Readings will be available on Stellar. Please check the stellar site and email communications from the teaching team on a regular basis; additional readings may be posted as the semester progresses.

Assignments & Expectations: The teaching team and the MIT Community Innovator’s Lab are involved in building a body of knowledge about PAR as a core democratic capacity and a critical practice in efforts for building economic democracy and self-determination. Through active engagement in class discussions and through quality written assignments/presentations, we expect students to play a role in helping to explore and build this body of knowledge. Over the course of the semester students will be expected to produce the following:

1. **Personal Theory of Practice:** Students will produce their own personal theory of planning/research practice. The assignment is expected to reflect your best thinking at this point in your education or career about the values, intentions, and methods that guide your work as a planner or researcher. Students will submit three iterations of this assignment to identify its evolution over the course of the module.

Version 1 Due: September 12 by noon

Version 2 Due: September 26 by noon

Version 3 Due: October 19 by noon

2. **Final Presentation:**

Presentation dates: October 17 or October 19

Further directions for each of these assignments will be given in class.

Grading:

Active participation:	30%
Personal Theory of Practice:	35%
Final Presentation:	35%

Office Hours: Office hours with members of the teaching team are available by appointment. Please reach out via email to schedule a time.

Disabilities: If you have a documented disability or any other problem you think may affect your ability to perform in class, please see one of the instructors early in the semester so that arrangements may be made to accommodate you.

Academic Misconduct: Plagiarism and cheating are both academic crimes. Never (1) turn in an assignment that you did not write yourself, (2) turn in an assignment for this class that you previously turned in for another class, or (3) cheat on an exam. If you do so, it may result in a failing grade for the class, and possibly even suspension from MIT. Please see Dayna Cunningham if you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism. Anyone caught cheating will be reported in line with recognized university procedures.

Final Exam: There will be no final exam.

Syllabus

CLASS 1. Thursday, September 7: WHAT IS PAR?

A core belief in PAR is that we study the world in order to transform it, and we understand society by trying to change it. What is Participatory Action Research, what are its origins, and what is its relationship to social justice? Overview of syllabus, course expectations, and the personal theories of practice we will develop as part of this course

Required Reading:

Greenwood & Levin (2007), Chapter 1

Reason & Bradbury (2008) Chapter 3 “Some Trends in the Praxis of Participatory Action Research”

CLASS 2. Tuesday September 12: PRINCIPLES OF PAR: IS THIS SCIENCE?

What principles guide PAR as an approach to research and in its orientation toward social justice? How do PAR practitioners operationalize these in practice? Does PAR have merit as a scientific enterprise? We will explore questions of objectivity, scientific versus value rationality, and criteria for research credibility, in relation to PAR.

Required Reading:

Greenwood and Levin, Chapters 4 & 5

Flyvberg (2001), *Making Social Science Matter*, Chapters 1, 3, 5

Thursday, September 14: SOCIAL JUSTICE & DEMOCRACY

What is the relationship between knowledge, communication, and democracy? What role does power play? How does the construction of competing forms of knowledge advance democracy? These questions underlie Participatory Action Research’s (PAR) commitment to know the world by changing it or making it more just. We will explore some of the ideas underlying PAR’s orientation toward enhanced democracy and social justice.

Required Reading:

Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Chapter 2

de Sousa Santos, *Another Knowledge is Possible*, Introduction: “Opening Up the Canon of Knowledge”

Tuesday, September 19: DEMOCRACY & CITIZEN SCIENCE

What is the relationship between knowledge, communication, and democracy? What role does power play? How does the construction of competing forms of knowledge advance democracy? These questions underlie Participatory Action Research’s (PAR) commitment to know the world by changing it or making it more just. We will explore some of the ideas underlying PAR’s orientation toward enhanced democracy and social justice.

Required Reading:

Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, Chapters 4, 5

Appadurai, “The Right to Research,” In (Journal of Globalisation, Societies and Education, Volume 4, No. 2, July 2006, pp. 167 – 177).

Thursday, September 21: GUEST PAR PRACTITIONER

Required Reading:

TBA

Tuesday September 26: THE PAR RESEARCHER

Reflective practice is a crucial tool in the PAR researcher’s toolkit. The PAR practitioner must be able to turn the beam of observation back on herself to better understand her own role and responsibilities in efforts to shape reality and contribute to social justice. How does the researcher shape the social system she studies? How do we engage identity and positionality? What practices can PAR researchers draw upon to understand and situate themselves in the research?

Required Reading:

Schon (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, Chapter 2

Greenwood & Levin (2007) Chapter 8

Fine (1994) “Working the Hyphens: Reinventing Self and Other in Qualitative Research.”

Thursday September 28: ETHICS & CO-PRODUCTION

What does co-producing knowledge between community and academic researchers entail in practice? What needs to be in place to enable genuine co-production of knowledge? How do PAR researchers address and engage issues of power, perceived legitimacy, and difference? Who brings what type of knowledge and expertise to a PAR process?

Required Reading:

Public Science Project PAR Map

Greenwood & Levin (2007), *Introduction to Action Research*, Chapter 7

Torre (2009) "Participatory Action Research and Critical Race Theory: Fueling Spaces for *Nos-Otras* to Research"

Tuesday October 3: METHODS & COLLABORATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

PAR involves and requires disciplined inquiry. What are the diverse methods PAR practitioners draw upon? How do PAR practitioners determine methods appropriate to the specific context they are working in? In PAR, how do academic and community researchers make sense of their findings collectively and collaboratively? How do politics of interpretation impact the analysis, conclusions, and our understandings of how knowledge is produced?

Required Reading:

Weis & Fine, *Compositional...Critical Theorizing and Analysis on Social (In)Justice*

Fine, et al. "Participatory Action Research From Within and Beyond Prison Bars"

Feilzer, "Doing Mixed Methods Research Pragmatically: Implications for the Rediscovery of Pragmatism as a Research Paradigm"

Thursday October 5: CONTEXT & THE POWER OF EXAMPLE

Context matters in PAR. How do PAR researchers take context seriously in the design and implementation of research? What are the implications for this context-specific knowledge to contribute to broader debates and action? Can we generalize from a single case? This class will also cover criteria of research credibility, including validity, reliability, generalizability, and workability.

Required Reading:

Flyvbjerg (2001), Chapters 4, 6

Tuesday October 10: NO CLASS

Thursday October 12: GUEST PAR PRACTITIONER

Required Reading:

TBA

Tuesday, October 17: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

Thursday October 19: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS