Participatory Action Research: An Experiment in Political Inquiry

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The Experiment:

- Why PAR?
- How to incorporate?
- Who to engage?

Road Map...

- What is Participatory Action Research?
What is PAR?

Multiple approaches but...

Research and Action must be done WITH people and not ON or FOR people

Integration!

Connecting academic interests with education and community development

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Pioneers in PAR
1940s – Present
PAR is informed by Critical Pedagogy

Role of Education:

- allow learners to regain sense of humanity
- recognize pedagogy is a political act
- treat learners as co-creators of knowledge vs. "banking" concept of student, empty object for teacher to fill
What is PAR? Some features...

- Researcher *removes biases*; becomes an “instrument” or facilitator
- Can use *multiple forms of data*; quant/qual; primary and secondary
- Findings typically *rich in description*
What is PAR? Some more features...

- Stress on **process**, not product
- Ongoing **inductive analysis**
- Data analysis, findings, conclusions provide **meaning**
- Findings inform **practice**
The Experiment

Why PAR?

- To connect theory and practice

Fall 2011
POS 496 Seminar

Introduction to Political Inquiry

Emphasis on “thinking, doing, and writing” in political science

- Overview
  Interdisciplinary nature of political studies: historical development, contemporary trends
- Introduction
  Different disciplinary empirical practices
- Skill-building
  Critical thinking, oral and written expression
- Professional development
  Thesis, conference, publication research/writing

Mondays 6-8:50 pm
Conference Room 417
mcox@ilstu.edu

Dr. Cox
Changing Teaching - Changing Learning

...Why PAR?

- Address issues; improve situations; **make change**

- Promote **professional growth**; develop skills, knowledge base

- Promote **collaboration**; is democratic; encourage “community”
How to Incorporate?

- **Readings** on Political Study
  - history/current status of the discipline
  - inquiry and empirical approaches
  - cultural and ethical dimensions

- Added application/case readings

- IRB training
Gauged Student Research Interest:

Broad topic: Civic engagement and democracy

Narrow topic: Community service/Volunteerism

Contacted Community Orgs: Red Cross, YWCA

Q: How can orgs best recruit and retain volunteers? (What are incentives? What are barriers?)
PAR as Problem-Solving
Who to Engage?

- Professor, graduate student teams
- Community organizations
  - Red Cross, YWCA
- General public

Collaboration on:
- Thesis question
- Lit review
- Methodology
  - Interviews
  - Focus groups
  - Questionnaires
- Analyses
- Findings/Discussion
The Challenges of PAR

- Acknowledging political bias
- Making group/collaboration work
- Sharing power; encouraging participation
- Teaching and learning (practice and skills)
- Assessing outcomes
The Results

**Academic** interests: *knowledge building*

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**Educational** goals: *learning*

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**Community** development: *capacity building*

= **Lessons Learned from PAR**