

ETHNIC STUDIES: ACTION RESEARCH IN THE BARRIO

GRADE LEVELS: 10th, 11th, 12th

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This yearlong curriculum is integral to an investigation of learning in the Youth Organizing and Civic Engagement Project (YOCEP) at El Rancho High School in Pico Rivera, California. The focus of Seminar I is on the critical analysis of the conditions impacting Chicano/Latino communities and students in particular. The curriculum unfolds via two pedagogical processes, i.e. *critical dialogue* and *cultural identity*. Seminar I ends with students identifying and contextualizing a social issue or problem in their communities.

The Action-Research Project Development phase centers on student research teams investigating a particular issue/problem. Research teams will be apprenticed with the tools of action-research, using both qualitative and quantitative research strategies, in the development of their projects. This phase will include research design, research strategies, data collection, and presentation of data to both their local community and to students at El Rancho High School, the site of this study.

Seminar II is a continuation of students' action-research projects, with an emphasis on how data and research can be used in addressing/solving community problems. This seminar focuses on action and community organizing strategies, such as presentations at school board meetings, city councils, and organizing community forums to educate local communities. YOCEP culminates with a design of sustainable action-research, where students learn about grassroots strategies and the formation of grassroots organizations.

SIGNIFICANCE

Civic engagement is at the core of educational policy at the state and local levels. The goals of the California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, a statewide coalition, intersect with the current push by the California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning. Commissioned by the California Department of Education (CDE), the California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning identified the urgent need to address civic learning, especially given the challenges local communities face and the "civic crisis" in our society. They argue for revamping the curriculum to include civic learning throughout. These goals are closely aligned with Chapman University's Civic Engagement Initiatives and Diversity Project.

From a research standpoint, studies on youth civic engagement and participation, while documenting the impact of programs, seldom prioritize learning processes. Because learning is central to a critical consciousness and civic engagement, studies that overlook or conceptually gloss over the mediation of a critical dialogue tend to de-emphasize a rich understanding of the micro-dynamics of learning. In this proposed study, the deliberate investigation of learning

processes should allow researchers to understand not just the relation between cultural identity, critical dialogue, and sustained civic engagement, but *how* each process is fostered, developed, and mediated.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Both *cultural identity* and *critical dialogue* are conceptualized as inter-related and integral to *sustained civic engagement & action*. The generative thesis of this study is that *sustained* civic engagement is developed when both critical dialogue for a social consciousness is conjoined with students reclaiming who they are. Critical dialogue that mediates a critical consciousness is important to youth civic engagement that is both informed and strategic. Understanding the way power operates, thinking historically and critically, and developing literacies for reading their social worlds are all vital to civic engagement. Nevertheless, what this study investigates is how pedagogical projects that nurture students' sense of self and belonging enrich and anchor civic engagement practices.

The figure below represents the inter-related nature of *cultural identity*, *critical dialogue*, and *sustained civic engagement & action*. Rather than conceptualize each dimension as causal, the conceptual framework regards these as interwoven contexts. The YOCEP project is deliberate in developing each component—with action-research as a major vehicle for *sustained civic engagement & action*.



COURSE OVERVIEW

The *Ethnic Studies: Action Research in the Barrio* course will focus on writing and research as tools for critically reflecting on students' lives. Action research strategies will be developed as vehicles for self and community transformation. Framed within the broad theme *Challenging Poverty and Inequality*, specific topics to be explored will be generative and defined alongside students and their community. Students will develop action research and social analysis skills that will assist them in critically re-framing their lives, understanding more deeply problems impacting their community with an orientation toward solving social issues. The course culminates with a research symposium.

COURSE CONTENT

Unit 1 – Becoming Critical Researchers & The Power of Critical Literacies

- Students are introduced to the idea of becoming critical researchers (and activists) of their communities and the importance of literacy (and writing in particular) in the social transformation of their worlds. Writing is used as a vehicle for reflecting on historical and institutional forms of oppression impacting Chicano-*Mexicano* and other communities.
- Students explore the power of defining, how writers use language to frame and re-represent people and processes. We look at popular texts such as articles from the Los Angeles Times and lyrics by Ded Prez, Tupac Shakur, etc.

Readings: (1) Selections from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*; (2) "In Defense of the Word" by Eduardo Galeano

Writing Assignment: n/a

Mini-Lesson(s): The Use of Figurative Language; Using Quotations and Citations

Unit 2 – The Sources of Our Oppression: Colonialism and Capitalism

- Concepts are tools for understanding our social worlds. Critical concepts such as *colonialism* and *capitalism* are explored via close reading of key texts. Tying them to students' lives, these concepts are explored via concrete connections to contemporary institutional policies and practices. In this unit the theme *Challenging Poverty and Inequality* is introduced and analyzed with the use of key concepts.
- The Extended Definition assignment asks students to look up basic, dictionary definitions for the term *oppression*. They then expand upon the basic definition via strategies, such as drawing connections to other texts (covered in this Unit), elaboration, compare/contrast, and the use of figurative language. The assignment is completed using a writers' workshop that includes revisions and discussion with peers. Upon completing the Extended Definition assignment, students will have a better understanding of the concept of *oppression* as well as refine their writing skills (of defining and synthesis).

Readings: (1) Selections from Eduardo Galeano's *Open Veins of Latin America*; (2) Selections from Rudy Acuña's *Occupied America*; (3) "Class Struggle" from Howard Zinn's *A Young People's History of the United States*.

Writing Assignment: Extended Definition of Oppression

Mini-Lesson(s): Defining; Sentence Combining

Unit 3 – Poverty, Schooling, and Inequality

- Students explore the power of synthesis. As text producers, they begin to articulate the statistics, framed as the "story behind the numbers," on the conditions impacting the educational trajectories of Chicano-*Mexicano* and

other racialized communities. They develop a critical re-framing and synthesis (termed *counterstorytelling*) vis-à-vis the use of concepts such as *deculturalization*, *colonialism*, and *institutional racism*.

- Students analyze statistics on their schools and community (Pico Rivera) vis-à-vis the lives of their peers. They accomplish this primarily through interviews that begin to critically "tell the story behind the numbers" and that challenge master narratives. Time is provided for students to develop their Schooling Autobiography assignment.
- The Schooling Biography assignment includes the Extended Definition assignment (Unit 1) as well as synthesis of research data on school indicators, plus integration of initial interview data. In this assignment students are asked to identify—using existing research—the schooling outcomes for minoritized youth and the range of explanations offered for why these outcomes exist. In developing their Schooling Biographies, students will analyze the modes of reasoning in explanations of student "failure" but will also use writing to critically challenge these explanations by integrating their lived-experiences and the stories of their peers.

Readings: (1) "School Segregation: The Social Reproduction of Inequality, 1870 to 1934" from *The Mexican Outsiders* by Martha Menchaca; (2) "Deculturalization and the Claim of Racial and Cultural Superiority by Anglo-Americans" from *Deculturalization and the Struggle for Equality* by Joel Spring.

Writing Assignment: Schooling Autobiography

Mini-Lesson(s): Synthesis; Interviewing; Counterstorytelling

Unit 4 - Participatory Action Research: Identifying Social Issues and Problems

- Building from the conceptual tools (developed in Unit 2) and narrative research strategies (developed in Unit 3), students begin to identify social issues and problems impacting their communities. The broad theme *Challenging Poverty and Inequality* sets the stage for student-led action-research projects in the *barrio* (community).
- Using their Extended Definition of Oppression, students define the experience of *poverty* via several activities and continued dialogue with key texts, which we revisit in this unit. The Museum of Poverty activity asks students to bring key artifacts from an initial search for the term *poverty*; photographs, statistics, and other information resources, that may be drawn from their homes and local community, are synthesized and exhibited at the mock "Museum of Poverty", which includes a gallery walk and further defining and synthesis of themes that assist students in refining the meanings of poverty.
- Having refined their understanding of poverty, students begin to develop their critical social analysis skills by exploring contexts and explanations for poverty. During this stage of the research process, the class will brainstorm sub-themes and ways to begin researching the broader theme. For example, the focus might be on institutions themselves (such as schools, prisons, factories, military, etc.) and how they impact the lives of Chicano-Mexicano communities in the United States. This initial phase ends with defining at least three general research questions that will guide their investigations.
- The Problem Identification phase include students forming research collectives around an identifiable theme. With an eye toward refining their social issue/problem, each group begins defining and also analyzing the

issue/problem. Particular critical thinking frames are used—such as *cause and effect*, *analysis*, *perspective*, and *evidence*—in assisting students with defining and exploring the social issue/problem.

- As part of their initial research, students will develop a concise review of studies on their topic. These will be drawn from both academic and other sources. They will then synthesize their issue/problem in the form of a Literature Review.

Readings: Select examples of Youth Participatory Action Research (UC Berkeley YPAR in Action; UCLA's Council of Youth Research; YouthUprising.org)

Writing Assignment: Extended Definition of Poverty; Literature Review

Mini-Lesson(s): Cause & Effect Frame; Problem Identification; Parenthetical Citations

Unit 5 – Participatory Action Research: Research Strategies

- This unit is focused on developing qualitative/interpretive research strategies. Each strategy will be taught in relation to students' research projects. Three key strategies that all students will develop are interviewing, surveying, and *autohistoria*. Photovoice and community walks are framed as specific research strategies and will be used insofar as they are useful in the exploration of their topics.
- Interviews: this method is essential to exploring the lived-experiences of participants. Interviews of students/youth, family members, elders, as well as key institutional players (such as elected officials, business owners, etc.) will be developed. The lesson includes modeling and co-designing interview protocols that have clearly defined topic(s) and congruent questions. Interviewing techniques are also taught, including probing questions and eliciting for narrative during the interview.
- Survey Research: this method is essential when gathering information about the perspectives of groups of people, especially when sampling of a larger community is needed. The lesson will include modeling, creating, and analyzing surveys.
- *Autohistoria*: a form of autobiography, this method draws from the lived-experiences of students engaged in the process of research. Characterized as "performative", it is a strategy that allows students to voice and transform in the process of telling their stories.

Readings: n/a

Writing Assignment: n/a

Mini-Lesson(s): Interviewing; Surveying; *Autohistoria*

Unit 6 – Participatory Action Research: Data Collection & Analysis

- The focus of this unit is on the analysis of data collected. Drawing from multiple information sources, students return to their topics by way of analysis and synthesis. In the qualitative/interpretive research tradition, this is best done via *coding*, a way of drawing out themes from the data.
- Another useful interview analysis strategy is the *narrative vignette*, which includes framing narrative drawn from interviews and analysis. The analysis includes drawing connections to existing literature and concepts explored earlier in the course—concepts that assist with contextualizing/explaining.
- Survey data will be analyzed using *descriptive statistics*, a method that allows for numerical synthesis and reporting of information gathered via survey methods. Basic concepts such as *average/mean*, *inference*, *distribution* will be taught in context of student-collected data.

Readings: n/a

Writing Assignment: n/a

Mini-Lesson(s): Descriptive Statistics; Coding; Narrative Vignette; Research Report Genre

Unit 7 – Culminating Research Symposium

- This final unit marks the culmination of students' action research projects. The focus is on the Action Research Project, whose synthesis, analysis and findings will be presented in a Research Symposium.
- The Research Symposium is a space where students come together to present their project to their school and local community. It is a space where they share their work in the form of poster presentations.
- Note: Alternative project presentations will also be considered, such as presenting to local school boards, city councils, political representatives, parent/community groups, and other students.
- The next phase includes the idea of taking action in the community. Students begin to design Community Action Plans, which are blueprints for social action. These are reflective spaces where students build from their research to make informed decisions about how to solve community problems. While the action-research inquiry process should be a space of self and community exploration, the shift toward research that changes communities is a powerful transition that allows students to envision hope in struggle.

Readings: n/a

Writing Assignment: Action Research Project; Community Action Plans

Mini-Lesson(s): Research Presentations; Designing Community Action Plans

COURSE TEXTS/RESOURCES

Open Veins of Latin America by Eduardo Galeano

"Class Struggle" by Howard Zinn

"School Segregation: The Social Reproduction of Inequality, 1870 to 1934" by Martha Menchaca

"Deculturalization and the Claim of Racial and Cultural Superiority by Anglo-Americans" by Joel Spring

"Immigration, Labor, and Generational Change" by Rudy Acuña

Research 4 Organizing,

The Community Development Project <http://www.researchfororganizing.org/>

UC Berkeley Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) Hub, <http://yparhub.berkeley.edu/>