Course Title: CYES 153: Participatory Action Research with Youth

Course Summary:
In the context of CYES 153, Clark undergraduates learn and research with high-school aged youth from Main South, Worcester. Worcester, MA is the second largest city in New England, and the Main South neighborhood is, demographically, the poorest neighborhood in Worcester, and where Clark University is situated. Participants form collaborative, intergenerational research groups to design, carry out, and present to the public a participatory or participatory action research project. The course is designed to apprentice students into the meaning and practice of participatory action research. Thus, students grapple with what youth participatory (action) research is and how it differs from other qualitative research traditions. They learn to enact the stance and tools of research, such as observing/taking field notes and interviewing. They also explore ways of analyzing and representing data, taking into account issues around ethics, power, and the responsibilities of representation. This class is also about what it means to work with and learn from youth. As such, the class will focus on how youth produce knowledge, understand their realities, and position themselves.

Course Goals:
- Explore the theories and perspectives that have shaped the development of participatory and participatory action research and its related methodologies and contributions
- Investigate the role of power and identity in the research process (e.g., who is the researcher and what is her relationship to participants and/or site of inquiry?)
- Engage in participatory research or participatory action research with Main South youth and community, enacting research as a form of civic engagement.
- Identify and reflect on the key challenges, tensions, and transformative elements of participatory research with youth
- Identify and discuss the means of addressing validity and ethics in youth participatory research
- Understand the ways in which participatory action research—its concepts, methodologies, and stance—can be shared with different audiences for different purposes
- Read ethnographic and qualitative research reports critically, using appropriate criteria to judge both the quality of the research, the author's techniques for presenting data, and the adequacy of evidence provided to support central claims.
- Learn about the Main South neighborhood and community from researching with youth.

Course Features:
The class will be structured around a mix of working methods—discussions of key themes and texts; group discussions of your own research projects and contexts; reports by groups and individuals; and fieldwork (i.e., observing or talking to people in a community). The structure of the class reflects the fact that we are working with youth. The course design draws on a pedagogical approach that is based on a collaborative, constructivist teaching/learning process and offers a seminar-like learning experience for a community of learners.

Course Assignments:
- **Researcher Identity and Positionality Paper:** In the first few weeks of class, we will discuss a variety of positions/stances that a researcher can assume in relationship to the community and research participants. Who are you in this research, and what kinds of experiences, worldviews, and commitments do you bring to the group and to the class? Choose a positionality/stance and reflect on why that stance appeals to you. Then reflect on the way that the positionality might influence your research.

- **Field Notes/Observation Exercise:** In a small group, you will select a site in the community and observe for an hour, using one of the protocols for taking field notes, and work towards generating what Geertz called a thick description. Each of you in the small group will observe from a different vantage point. Please type up the field notes and bring them to class.
● **Research and Action Plan:** With your group, you will submit a plan for your small-scale participatory research or participatory action project. You will include your research question (revised to reflect feedback from the instructor and others) and your plan for collecting and analyzing data (e.g., who, where, and how will you collect data?). Please consider the challenges you might encounter in your research.

● **Research Paper and Presentation:** The research paper (co-written by your research team) is the culmination of all the work from the course. Your paper should include the following: a problem statement; research question or questions; context; method of collecting and making sense of data; and a preliminary overview of what you’re learning from the process of PAR. You may also discuss what you would like to do differently in the next project, what aspects of the project were particularly challenging and enjoyable, and how you can apply the ideas and practices of participatory research to your work in the community, your education, your goals, and your aspirations. In the presentation, you should share not only the knowledge you generated, but also the ways in which such knowledge can benefit and enrich individuals and communities. You can share your knowledge with your audience in the form of a poster, presentation, dance, performance, and photo-book.

**Course Title:** CYES 295: Praxis Design Seminar

**Course Summary:**
The overarching purpose of the Praxis Design Seminar is to prepare CYES students to develop their portfolios and prepare them to launch their community-based praxis project. The praxis project is a long-term action research project in which students, deeply immersed in a community space, will engage with others to create greater social justice and document the process in a large socially just research model. Hopefully, students enter the Praxis Design course already well-situated in a space where they want to conduct their praxis projects. If not, they will need to find their sites and become situated in the first few weeks of the course. The course is designed so that students will finalize their own theorizing on the three theories of understanding that guide the CYES major: 1) a critical theory of social inequality, 2) a reflexive analysis of social and cultural identity and 3) a theory of social change. As such, they are expected to revise and finalize their earlier thinking about each theory of understanding, producing final portfolio pieces for each. Students will draw from writings created in earlier coursework to develop their final portfolio pieces. Class time will be devoted to discussing course readings, interrogating the linkages between theory and practice, and workshopping their portfolio pieces. Students will develop and publish their final portfolio pieces in the first half of the semester. These larger and more general portfolio pieces will then become situated as students develop their Praxis Project Proposals, negotiate the IRB process, and get fully prepared to launch their Praxis Projects.

**Course Goals:**
Throughout the semester we will work towards the following:

- Investigate the role of power and identity in the research process and praxis projects (e.g., who is the researcher and what is her relationship to her site of inquiry?)
- Situate your praxis design in critical social, social change, and identity frameworks
- Identify and discuss the means of addressing validity and ethics in your praxis work
- Understand the ways in which your praxis work—concepts, methodologies, and stance—can be shared with different audiences for different purposes
- Make connections between and among and apply ideas and practices from previous CYES courses to your praxis design.
- Develop a Praxis Project proposal with an introduction, theoretical framework, methodology, and methods.

By the end of the seminar, participants will have produced the following:

1. **Revised portfolio pieces**
   a. Critical Social Theory
   b. Positionality and Identity in Social Context
   c. Theories of Social Change
2. **Praxis Project Proposal**
   a. Introduction
Course Features:
This course is driven by a social justice agenda. Those enrolled in this course will be prepared to work toward more socially just and equitable spaces. The pedagogy of this course mirrors the commitments to knowledge construction we will learn about over the course of the semester. We want you to learn content, but the process of learning it and the ways you come to grapple with the content are equally as important. Thus, the guiding principles behind the pedagogy of this course are:

- **Praxis:** Rather than simply read the theory and discuss it, we will make attempts to implement the practices that we read about. We will engage in the reflexive process of reading and thinking about theory and attempting to implement this theory both in our work in the community as well as our work together in the class. Our attempts will inform the ways we consider new theory. An important part of this process (and central to Freire’s notion of praxis) is that this reflection goes hand in hand with our efforts to act. Thus, critical reflection and action work together to create learning that matters.

- **Dialogic:** As bell hooks states, “To engage in dialogue is one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers, scholars, and critical thinkers to cross boundaries, the barriers that may or may not be erected by race, gender, class, professional standing, and a host of other differences” (hooks, 1994, *Teaching to Transgress*, p. 130). Dialogue is central to Freirean theories about education and social change. It is not only a practice, but an ideological stance. It is about how learners are situated together and how learning is co-constructed. Paulo Freire writes, “Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers.” Further he states, “Founding itself upon love, humility and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence.” We seek to build this horizontal relationship in which all of us are recognized as learners striving to make sense of our world. We all bring different funds of knowledge to this work and through dialogue, based on action and reflection, we come to understand not only better, but differently.

- **Relational:** Because we see that our learning is dependent on one another, we recognize our duty to each other. If we come underprepared (reflecting our whole selves—not just our mental preparation, but taking care of our bodies and spirits as well), we impact the learning of others. Thus, reading and studying are a duty not only for our learning, but for the community, as Freire states in a conversation with Donald Macedo: “To study demands discipline. To study is not easy because to study is to create and re-create and not to repeat what others say. To study is a revolutionary duty!” Also, for learning to take place, we must embrace both our responsibility to engage in dialogue fully, expressing our knowledge, our questions, our vulnerabilities and being open to the knowledge, questions, and vulnerabilities of others. We must also embrace one another as learners, incomplete beings each striving for our own realization as full human beings. This means that we need to create the spaces, ask the questions, challenge the assumptions, and hold the faith that will enable all of us to grow.

- **Respecting the student and teacher as both learner and knowledgeable:** As participants in the educational system, as life-long learners, and students advanced in the study of education, you come to this course with deep experiential knowledge on the educational system. Texts, activities, and assignments have been chosen to build on, supplement, and challenge our present understandings of education and knowledge construction. In this course, we will use readings, discussions, activities, and each other’s perspectives/ experiences to consider ways to become critical thinkers and caring agents of social change. We will also recognize that the teacher is also a student and is learning from the dialogue and engagement in readings and activities and will not have all the answers. Indeed, we will seek to ask questions where the answers are not always clear to everyone.

- **Learner Centered:** In general, we foster learner-centered and constructivist pedagogy that is framed with equitable participation in mind. We will employ multiple pedagogical elements that can be used in your own
work with youth and adults (when facilitating discussion or leading workshops, for example). As with all learning, we believe in the notion that conversation among learners is essential in fully formulating and encoding knowledge. We believe that the notion of the guide on the side instead of the sage on the stage is the most beneficial metaphor for instruction. We are also cognizant of modeling various forms of equitable participation that take into consideration diverse learning styles and personal subjectivities that often enter classroom discourse.

**Course Assignments:**

*Theory of Understanding 1 Portfolio Piece—Your Critical Theoretical Explanation of Social Inequality*
- Theory of Understanding 2 Portfolio Piece—Reflexive Paper on Your Positionality and Identity in the World
- Theory of Understanding 3 Portfolio Piece—Your Guiding Theory of Social Change
- Final Praxis Project Proposal
  - Introduction
  - Theoretical Framing
  - Methodology -- Research Design, Data Collection, Data Analysis
  - Significance
- IRB proposal
- Final Defense of your Portfolio and Praxis Project Proposal