Why Do We Research?

Social Research, Power and the Role of Action Research
Goals for Social Research

- To understand society and social processes.
- To create better social theories.
- To inform social action.
- To improve social conditions.
Achieving our Goals

- Gaining Knowledge
- Improving lives
- Creating or Evaluating Policy
- Raising Awareness
- Building Community
Problems of Power

- Power Over and Power To
  - Designing research from the top down
  - Designing research across
  - Designing research from the bottom up

- Differing power and status
  - Researcher power
  - Researched power
  - Institutional power
About Power and Privilege

- What privileges do you have?
  - Give me some examples
- What power do you have over your research projects?
  - What are the costs of your research?
  - What are the benefits of your research?
    - To participants?
    - To society as a whole?
Power and Knowledge

- Where does knowledge come from?
- Who “owns” knowledge?
  - Who gets to decide what ‘counts’ as valuable knowledge?
  - How is knowledge disseminated?
- Why does that matter?
The Nature of Knowledge

- Knowledge is situated.
  - Historical and cultural specificity of knowledge.
- ‘Knowledge’ and ‘truth’ are subject to revision.
  - We should maintain a critical stance towards ‘taken for granted’ assumptions.
- Knowledge and social action go together.
  - How we ‘think’ about something shapes how we ‘act’ towards it.
Introducing Action Research

- Characteristics
  - rejects a clear separation between researchers and researched.
  - Focuses on the importance of all groups of stakeholders
  - Addresses the issues of power inherent in research
Types of Action Research

- Participatory Action Research
  - Includes the idea that researched should be directly involved in research processes
    - They look for equal participation between researchers and participants.
  - Further argues that all research is political
    - Do you agree or disagree
Types of Action Research

- Feminist Action Research
  - Focused on ‘giving voice’
  - Created to raise awareness of social inequalities
  - Focuses on Social activism
Types of Action Research

- Evaluation Research
  - Tries to evaluate the effectiveness of social policy by analyzing impact
  - For example: Abstinence only education
Look, Think, Act

- Identify Stakeholders
  - Who are affected by the social problem?
  - Who should contribute to the discussion?

- Formulate a Collective Problem
  - Group definition of the problem
  - Guided by group knowledge not researcher knowledge
Look, Think, Act

- Explore the problem through collective meeting
  - The groups who are involved discuss the parts of the problem
  - The develop and discuss each stakeholders position on the problem
Look, Think, Act

- Defining and Agenda for Action
  - Craft a solution.
  - What can be done?
  - How can we do it?
  - Who needs to be involved?
  - What needs to change?
In Class Activity -
Step 1: Getting into Groups

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<th>Campus Social Life</th>
<th>Identity and Space</th>
<th>Activities &amp; Groups</th>
<th>Daily Life &amp; Self Care</th>
<th>Campus Community</th>
<th>Athletics</th>
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Class Activity - Step 2: Meeting the Group

- Introduce yourself and share your research plans
- Discuss what similarities and differences exist in your projects
- Consider how these similarities and differences might be tied to a social problem of interest to you.
- Take notes, you will need them next time!
In Class Activity - Step 3: Mock Action Plan

- Based on your group interests identify a problem statement that could be explored using Action Research…
- Form an action plan using the steps identified in the reading and discussed in class.
- Turn in a set of discussion notes that explains your problem and discusses how it could be addressed using action research.