**Participatory Community Engagement**

**Community Partnerships, 2015-2016**

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**I. Course Description**

**This course has two primary goals. First, students will gain an understanding of the theory behind participatory community development, popular education and critical pedagogy. Second, in class and through partnerships with local organizations and communities students will learn and use key participatory facilitation strategies. The purpose of the class Community Project is to help a community organization explore issues they are interested in and/or struggling with by designing and implementing processes that create a space for listening, dialogue and collective analysis.**

**II. Project Purposes**

1. **Through community partnerships students learn how to design and implement participatory processes that elicit the experiences, perspectives, wisdom, voices, hopes, dreams, and concerns of a community or segments of a community.**
2. **For our partnering organization to open up new spaces where the experiences, perspectives and concerns of community and organization members are heard.**
3. **To collect “data” (wisdom, perspectives, skills, stories, images, ideas, creative mappings) from the perspectives of the community and staff that help the organization better understand the lived experiences of staff and the people they serve and work with.**
4. **To synthesize and analyze this “data” and present it back to the community/staff in a way that prompts dialogue and collective analysis.**
5. **To facilitate generative dialogue about issues of concern to this community.**
6. **To analyze and creatively document findings from the listening, seeing, and dialogue in a way that is useful to our partner as they move forward. *This year these findings will be documented and presented in the form of student authored digital Tool Kits.***

**III. Project Principles: Popular Education & Participatory Action Research**

**Popular education is a community education effort, aimed at empowering adults through cooperative study and action that is directed toward achieving a more just and equitable society. Traditionally, its’ priority, popular education principles are aimed toward the poor, oppressed, and marginalized people whose understandings of the world are often excluded from the production of expert and scientific knowledge production. The colonial histories of the world have taught us that these very exclusions and silences play a central role in the oppression and control of poor and marginalized peoples.**

**Popular Education and its research sister, Participatory Action Research (PAR), are based on the assumption that the world can be changed. It is not static and predictable, and everyday people can make significant change. Popular education invites people to learn about themselves and the world, in order to make the world the place it can be for them and their children. In practice, popular education and participatory research projects and processes bring people together, build confidence and trust, foster a sense of group identity and solidarity, and engage people in dialogue and critical analysis of the issues that most concern them. In order to do this work, one must consider the following principles:**

* **All people are active subjects, not objects, of their own lives.**
* **People learn through collective dialogue and analysis, not in isolation.**
* **Knowledge is not simply information handed down by experts but is rather built on the lived knowledge of the people experiencing the problem under analysis.**
* **To truly build new knowledge, learners must participate in determining what is to be learned.**
* **Popular education is not neutral. It is a process of consciousness building where one must recognize the relationships between the oppressed and the forces that oppress.**
* **True learning combines thinking and feeling, starting from people’s lived experience.**
* **Collective study and mutual learning leads to informed action.**

**By understanding these principles processes are designed to listen to people whose perspective are often not heard and to prompt dialogue and collective analysis, but must not determine the specific steps and outcomes in advance. A popular education facilitator must be open to follow the interests and ideas of the participants while providing prompts and feedback along the way. The process of collective study, of analyzing issues of direct significance to the participants, often leads to action. Because we are participants in a University class and will not necessarily remain engaged with our Community Partner beyond the scope of the semester, it is our job to begin a process, and synthesize what we heard, but it is NOT our job to initiate action. This is the job of those living and working in the communities engaged.**

**IV. Community Engagement Methodologies**

* **A series of one-on-one listening sessions to build trust and understanding among project participants**
* **Bringing small groups together to discuss a shared, or set of shared, problems**
* **Community building, dialogue and problem solving workshops**
* **Collectively discussing and analyzing the issue or issues identified (using verbal and visual prompts, the arts, theater, storytelling)**
* **Visual participatory mapping of people’s experiences, hopes, concerns**
* **Documentary media such as storytelling, oral history, or video**
* **Creatively documenting preliminary findings and analysis**
* **Sharing findings back with community in a way that prompts and facilitates dialogue and collective analysis**
* **Collective data analysis, interaction exploration of issues, and creative communication strategies**
* **Creative and interactive documentation of findings for partner to carry forward with them as they plan for action**

**V. Sample of Past Community Partnerships**

**Procedural Justice with the Midtown Community Court, CCI**

In the spring of 2013 the class engaged in a project with the Midtown Community Court (MCC), which is a problem solving community justice nonprofit organization associated with the Center for Court Innovation. The collaborating partners agreed to design and conduct a comprehensive procedural justice study of the MCC. Procedural justice proposes that criminal cases result in better outcomes for individuals and communities when the values of respect, voice, trust, helpfulness, and transparency are valued. The participatory study design included interviews, focus groups, and community engagement activities with staff, court personnel, on-site partner agencies, defendants and clients; and an analysis of the physical space and representation of the court in the neighborhood. The project resulted in a public engagement with the entire staff, a written report, a graphic report of the community building sessions, and dialogues among CCI/MCC staff on how to better serve the principles of procedural justice.

**Youth Action Research, Red Hook Community Justice Center, Brooklyn**

Throughout the 2011-2012 academic year the Participatory Community Engagement course designed and implemented a Youth Action Research project alongside the Youth Advisory Board of the Red Hook Community Justice Center. During this fall semester 2 graduate student assistants and the instructor designed and facilitated research planning and design sessions with the youth to structure the spring field research. The youth decided to focus on high school drop out rates and gang involvement among youth in the Red Hook neighborhood. During the spring semester the students in the Participatory Community Engagement class joined the project and assisted in the implementation. The project built facilitation, leadership, research, analysis, and public presentation skills among both the Milano graduate students and Red Hook Youth who presented their findings to the staff of the Red Hook Community Justice Center.

**Tenant Leader Voices, Tenants and Neighbors**

Tenants and Neighbors is a historic tenants’ rights and advocacy organization in New York City. While the organization is a membership-based organization the program directors expressed interest in working with the Participatory Community Engagement class to build community among tenant leaders and re-connect to the ‘grassroots’ membership that the professional staff felt increasingly removed from. By designing a series of one on one dialogues that built up to a set of three-hour community building gatherings, the Participatory Community Engagement class unearthed a wealth of stories, emotions, commitments, hopes, and fears among tenant membership. Members and staff were so greatly moved by the experience facilitated through our partnership that they asked us to assist in the publication of a member’s stories booklet that they could use to build upon their tenants rights advocacy across the state. The leadership also decided to use the pedagogy and facilitation tools developed through out project at a regular basis at staff meetings and retreats.

**Histories of Abandonment and Resilience, Manida Street Scrapbook**

In partnership with the Hunts Point Alliance for Children the Participatory Community Engagement class worked alongside the residents of the Manida Street Houses in the South Bronx in their struggle for housing justice. Long abandoned by an absentee landlord and the city, the Manida Houses were termed the ‘House of Horrors’ in several New York Times exposes on housing abuses in the South Bronx. Often with no heat or clean running water, holes in the walls and ceilings, dangerous and semi-functional electrical outlets, and dark and dangerous abandoned units, the families of Manida Street decided to fight back. After a lengthy struggle and the assistance of the Hunts Point Alliance for Children the Manida Street Tenants Association won a legal battle against the owner, requiring a building sale and upgrade. Our partnership involved a series of community building workshops with Manida residents to reflect on the past, and plan for the future, documenting the struggles of tenants and co-creating a vision for the future. The results of our work together beyond the scope of the semester include revived energy, pride, and commitment among elders and youth in the building, and the publication of the Manida Street Scrapbook which Manida organizers now use to educate residents within Manida and across the city in the broader movement for housing justice.

**VI. 2015-16 Community Partnerships**

**Learning with Teaching Artists, Groundswell Murals**

Groundswell is New York City’s leading community public arts organization that engages artists, underserved, marginalized and economically disadvantaged young people, and community members in creating visible and permanent change in some of New York City’s most challenged neighborhoods. Over its 18-year history, Groundswell has employed thousands of artists, youth, and community members in the creation of upwards of 500 works of public art throughout all five boroughs of New York City. To make this happen Groundswell works with ‘Teaching Artists’ who build relationships with community partners and participating youth, families, and neighbors. Groundswell has invited us to engage these Teaching Artists in a process of reflecting on their own work and collaboratively developing a set of community engagement methods and strategies to improve their capacity to do this important work with New York City neighborhoods, youth, families, and partnering organizations. While there is room for creative project development, in very broad brushstrokes this is what our partnership with Groundswell might look like:

* Read about and analyze the approach of Groundswell, the field of community based arts, and positive youth development
* Develop a set of questions and participatory research plans for gaining a deep understanding of Groundswell’s work
* Interview Groundswell staff about the community engagement component of their work
* Meet, interview, and shadow Teaching Artists to understand their hopes, skills, and needs
* Participate in Groundswell events and activities
* Design and facilitate a convening for Teaching Artists to reflect upon their work, learn from one another, and engage in a discussion about approaches to community engagement
* Work with the Teaching Artists and Groundswell staff to identify three-five community engagement methodologies to further develop.
* Develop community engagement learning tools, workshops, and participatory training materials (Spring 2016)
* Test out the desired community engagement methodologies with Groundswell project participants (Spring 2016)
* Co-create and publish a community engagement curriculum or Tool Kit for Groundswell Teaching Artists (Spring 2016)
* Possibly co-design and facilitate a workshop or public dialogue with the Groundswell Teaching Artists and youth participants for the April 2016 Humanities Action Lab Exhibit on Global Dialogues on Incarceration (Spring 2016).

**Creating a Tool Kit for Facilitating Dialogue on Incarceration - Humanities Action Lab – Global Dialogues on Incarceration Project**

The Humanities Action Lab (HAL) is an international hub, located at The New School, where faculty, students and community partners design and generate curricula and opportunities for public engagement with urgent social issues. Together HAL’s partners aim to cultivate new public dialogue on contested, deadlocked social issues by exploring diverse local histories and current realities of shared global concerns. Global Dialogues is a Humanities Action Lab project where partners create public projects every three years exploring histories, memories, and current realities. The first focus is on the past, present, and future of incarceration. There are currently 20 university campus and community partners involved in designing courses and exhibitions around the history of incarceration in the United States. The partners will all come together in an initial exhibit at The New School in New York City in April of 2016 before traveling to at least 16 other cities.

HAL has invited us to create a Tool Kit for the Global Dialogues project that includes best practices, tools, lessons, sample agendas, and general information on facilitating dialogue around the issues of incarceration. While the project is still open to creative development and interpretation, here are some ideas:

* Meet with staff at HAL to understand the initiative, the need, and resources on dialogues on incarceration (and facilitating dialogue in general) that currently exist
* Map the terrain of community based organizations in New York City already engaging communities in dialogue, community building, and organizing around incarceration (we already have a long list of excellent organizations to reach out to!)
* Interview community leaders and organizers to understand their practice, hopes, challenges, and some of the important conversations taking place around incarceration today
* Participate in, assist, and learn from NYC dialogues on incarceration with various interested communities and organizations
* Choose two-three community based organizations to work with in shaping dialogue guides and curriculum (perhaps feature, highlight, and promote various important organizations and their own work to facilitate dialogue on incarceration)
* Test out dialogue models in various settings at The New School and beyond (Spring 2016)
* Design, test, and produce a Tool Kit on global dialogues on incarceration (Spring 2016)
* Design and facilitate a dialogue for the April 2016 HAL Exhibit (Spring 2016)

**VII. Partnership Arc / Suggested Timeline for 2015-2016**

**September: Planning**

* **Learn about the PCE Community Partnership approach and options for 2015-16**
* **Review information from Groundswell and HAL**
* **Decide upon which project to join**
* **Build relationships and plans with classmates in Community Partnership groups**
* **Meet with Community Partner (Groundswell or HAL) to set course together**
* **Start to develop interview questions and plans for community listening and observation phase**

**October: Listening and Observing**

* **Finalize interview and observation plans**
* **Interview as many staff and community members as possible**
* **Shadow, observe, participate in community sites**
* **Document and analyze findings**
* **Conduct outside research on issues of concern to Community Partners (literature, models, online resources in the field)**
* **Meet with one another to share and analyze findings – ongoing**

**November: Synthesizing, Convening, and Planning**

* **Complete interviews, observations, and preliminary data collection**
* **Analyze findings and cross cutting themes that emerged**
* **Convene a core group of Community Partnership participants to share back findings and build dialogue on issues of shared concern (Groundswell project convenes Teaching Artists, HAL convenes identified CBO leaders who engage communities in critical dialogue about mass incarceration)**
* **Analyze and write up dialogue and learning from the Community Partner convening.**
* **Collaboratively develop a *Project Prospectus* for Spring 2016 community engagement activities, workshops, dialogue, and Tool Kit production.**

**December: Planning and Reflection**

* **Share Project Prospectus with Erica, Giselle, and Community Partner contacts for feedback and revisions.**
* **Reflect on first semester and plan for Spring 2016**

**Spring 2016**

* **Plan and conduct community engagement workshops, events, retreats, dialogue sessions, etc. including in April Humanities Action Lab Exhibit on Global Dialogues on Incarceration**
* **Document methodologies, practices, stories, and learning from the engagements**
* **Conduct outside research on best practices in Cultural Organizing (Groundswell Project) and Dialogue on Incarceration (HAL) to inform development of Tool Kits**
* **Review and assess community engagement Tool Kits from the field**
* **Continue community engagements, workshops, etc.**
* **Participate (facilitate dialogue) in Humanities Action Lab Exhibit on Global Dialogues on Incarceration – April 2016.**
* **Collaborative develop draft Tool Kits with community partners**
* **Produce final Tool Kits for Community Partners, Groundswell and Humanities Action Lab**
* **Reflection, Review**

**Celebrate!!!!**