
Sample Lesson 3: Youth-Led Participatory Action Research (YPAR)

Theme: Social Movements and Equity

Disciplinary Area: All disciplinary areas

Youth-Led Participatory Action Research

Getting students to engage primary sources, develop Youth-Led Participatory Action Research (YPAR) projects, or create service-learning projects are just a few examples of how an inquiry-based approach encourages students to become engaged actors within the learning process. Youth-Led Participatory Action Research provides young people with opportunities to study social problems affecting their lives and then determine actions to rectify these problems. Students will take what they learned in earlier units to do a college preparatory research project that utilizes sound methodology to study a problem identified, for its culminating unit. This YPAR project has a guided process that allows the students then to use their research to develop an action plan to address the problems that they have studied.

A course can utilize an ethnic studies framework based on the goal of deepening students' understanding of both the past and the present through continual reflection on the interaction between the two. Students learn to shift analytical lenses between their personal lives and the larger social and historical context that has created the environment within which they live. This process deepens students' understanding of themselves by grounding it in history, and it deepens their appreciation of history by connecting it to their contemporary lives.

This dynamic can be demonstrated with a specific focus on a particular subgroup, such as Asian Americans. Each unit is constructed to build upon the previous unit. Each unit draws from primary documents, students' personal experiences, community and/or family members' experiences, and scholarly essays. All of these sources come together to value knowledge that goes beyond what is published in history textbooks.

The culminating project for the course also requires students to employ both their personal, contemporary analytical lens and their historical analytical lens. Students work in teams to develop lessons based on the content of their ethnic studies course and teach the lessons to students at middle or elementary schools in their communities. Lesson development emphasizes the connections that the high school students must find between the historical material and the lives of the middle school students in order to assure the success of the lessons. Student writing is the principal form of assessment in this course. Short in-class or homework writing assignments provide formative assessment of daily activities, and the collection of writing assignments outlined above provides a summative assessment for each unit.

In addition, oral presentations are used to assess student learning, as in Unit 1 (sharing the document box), Unit 3 (performance of a five-minute play), Unit 4 (teaching project), and Unit 6 (oral history project). Most units include a project by which student work is assessed. Unit 4 features a teaching project. Students should be taking what they learned in the first semester (Units 1–3) and develop a lesson plan on a specific topic within the subgroup focus. They will follow the lesson plan to teach the topic at a nearby middle or elementary school. They will be taught how to do the research to develop a well-structured lesson plan with interactive exercises that will engage the students in the class that they are teaching. The lesson plan must draw from the concepts presented in Units 1–3. This becomes the major assessment for semester 1.

Ultimately, the main assessment will be the outcome of the Youth-Led Participatory Action Research Project, where both writing and oral skills will be tested. Students will take what they learned in Units 1–7 to do a college preparatory research project that utilizes sound methodology to study a problem in the identified subgroup community. This YPAR project has a guided process that allows the students to then use their research to develop an action plan to address the problems that they studied. The writing assignments described below are produced through a writer's workshop process that includes structured brainstorming activities, multiple drafts, peer editing, and publication within the classroom or school.

The following shows how each term in YPAR is operationalized.

YOUTH: Young people between the ages of 14 and 24.

PARTICIPATORY: All participants, including youth, are seen as experts who have important experiences and knowledge.

ACTION: The goal is to use youth research to develop a plan of action toward bettering their communities.

RESEARCH: A systematic investigation of a problem facing youth.

This course implements culturally and community responsive pedagogy by focusing on marginalized histories that are often neglected in mainstream history courses and connecting them to community issues that need to be addressed. Geneva Gay defines culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them; it teaches to and through the strengths of these students. Gay also describes culturally responsive teaching as having these characteristics:

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Course Implementation:

- It acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum.
- The course would look at the diversity amongst one marginalized subgroup but also the collective experiences impacted by racism. This is evidenced by the use of primary sources.
- It builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences, as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities.