Participatory Action Research as Pedagogy: Boundaries in Syracuse

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Abstract

This paper explores the potential of participatory action research (PAR) as pedagogy in urban university classrooms. We address models and ideals of service learning, participatory action research, and critical pedagogy. We then explain the design, implementation, and outcomes of a recent class co-taught in the

departments of geography, women's studies, and architecture at Syracuse University called 'Boundaries in Syracuse'. The class was organized conceptually and practically around the objective of documenting the boundaries at work in the daily lives of city residents. We find that principles of critical pedagogy substantiate the basis of participatory action research as an approach that addresses some of the shortcomings of service learning. We reflect on the class to assess the opportunities that accompany PAR in the urban classroom as well as the challenges, including (among others) the resources required and the gendering of community-engaged work at universities.

Co-taught in 2005 by two assistant professors and two teaching assistants in architecture, geography, and women's studies, the Boundaries in Syracuse class brought together conceptual ideas on urban geography, architecture, and gender to study and confront boundaries at work in the daily lives of city residents. The process engaged visual and textual forms of learning and created an innovative, hybrid pedagogical model that drew on the paradigm of participatory action research. The class partnered with five community organizations: Syracuse University's (SU) Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Resource Center, the Community Folk Art Center, Planned Parenthood, Home Headquarters, and the Northside Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) Refugee Resettlement. The instructors met with these organizations to devise collaborative projects that would bring diverse members of the city together across the divides that often artificially separate the university from the surrounding community.

On the second day that our class of graduate and undergraduate students met, employees of the community organizations with whom they would collaborate all semester visited to describe their work and their hopes for the research projects. The director of Syracuse University's LGBT Resource Center had the most experience working with researchers.[2] She shared a story of being approached recently by an instructor in the social sciences who asked her the best way for students to observe people in the LGBT community. Her response? 'Look out your window!'

The director's story stayed with us as we ventured along with twenty-one students to explore the meaning of critical engagement with community from our

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[2] The LGBT Resource Center and the Community Folk Art Center were the two organizations among the five that were affiliated with Syracuse University. The former is located on campus; the latter is a unit of the Department of African American Studies, but located off-campus.

swank perch in the university on the hill. We were employees and students of the largest employer in an increasingly impoverished and deindustrializing urban setting in an upstate New York rust belt city. SU sits in the center of the city on a hill separated by guard booths and policed by campus security.

The director of the Resource Center had called upon us to dissolve the boundaries between researchers and researched, between a community that was 'out there' as opposed, somehow, to those of us 'in' here. We set out to map and challenge these and other boundaries by experimenting collaboratively with participatory action research. In so doing, we also attempted to dissolve some of the hierarchies at work in traditional models of field research and service learning, while documenting boundaries that inhibited residents' daily mobility, access, and inclusion in urban life.

This paper argues that participatory action research offers genuine pedagogical opportunities and responds to some of the underlying assumptions of models of service learning, both elaborated in the next section. The paper reflects on the research process with a focus on the value of university-organization collaborations. We begin by discussing critical concerns with service learning that served as starting points for the design of a class that would cross boundaries in content and process. We review service learning and PAR as teaching methods distinguished by substantive dedication to pressing social problems and process-oriented emphasis on the transformative potential of participation. We highlight principles of critical pedagogy on which we base our argument that PAR responds to existing critiques of service learning and improves upon it. The paper then provides concrete examples from the class taught by co-authors of this paper, addressing the course design, the projects and their contributions to social change, and the challenges and opportunities that accompany PAR. In conclusion, we advocate PAR as a particularly effective model for critical community engagement.

Framing community-engaged pedagogy

Within the literature, authors diverge significantly in their characterizations of service learning. They alternately identify service learning as 'approach', 'philosophy', 'tradition', 'teaching method', and 'program' (see Jacoby, 1997). In fact, Stanton et al. (1999, 247-248) identify twenty-seven 'strands' of service learning. Generally, the principle behind service learning is the idea that volunteer work enhances student learning while contributing to local communities. Barbara Jacoby (1996, 5) provides a succinct definition: 'Service learning is a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human

and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development.'

Jacoby (1999, 6-7) goes on to identify 'reflection' and 'reciprocity' as key elements and to note that students endeavor through service learning to answer questions identified by community members. And yet these are precisely the areas where service learning has been most commonly critiqued. Critiques of service learning focus on two interrelated issues: how service learning impacts student learning, and how it affects the needs of communities being 'served'. Too often service learning relies on student volunteerism framed as charity, as the donation of hours to 'help' recipients in need. Such engagement can undermine student processes of action and reflection and perpetuate status quo social relations in the community by reinforcing the differences between 'us' and 'them'. It cannot be assumed that the 'logging' of charitable hours with community institutions will benefit those involved, in terms of either social change or educational objectives.

In his weekly journal, one student in the class who had grown up in Syracuse's poorer, primarily African-American south side described previous frustrations with university service:

> What about… Syracuse's South Side where a vast percentage of Caucasian and Minority students alike obtain the community service hours and volunteer service requirements needed for the successful completion of course objectives? To show the superficial façade of care and concern for a semester in the African American community and then to depart promotes distrust.

Frank[3] questioned whether those classes that rely on service learning models offer the necessary resources for a commitment to social change, suggesting that a more sustained effort was required to improve the conditions in South Syracuse.[4] He critiqued practices of service that held the short-term academic or career interests of students over community benefits.

Frank's frustrations resonate with literature on the relationship between service learning and neoliberalism. 'Host' communities' primary critique of service learning is that such programs fulfill a sense of volunteerism without challenging the status quo. Ochoa and Ochoa (2004, 6) observe from their

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[3] Names are pseudonyms to protect identity.

[4] There are much larger community-university partnerships now happening in this neighborhood, notably the South Side Initiative which began as a grassroots community initiative.

experiences in Los Angeles that, 'Paralleling the rhetoric of neoliberalism, volunteer work tends to be disconnected from a critical analysis of history and society and is often based on the perspective that the individuals and groups being 'served' are somehow deficient in expertise, knowledge, and skills'. In this case student participation re-affirms paternalistic programming and perpetuates dependencies by supporting 'band-aid' solutions to community problems. Robinson (2000, 4) also likens service learning to neoliberalism, noting how 'students and instructors step in where the welfare state has retreated, but do little to sow the seeds of social transformation and national healing.' Volunteers may feel good about providing a needed service, even while the identified need resulted from deliberate decisions to remove services (see Herbert, 2005).

Authors differ not only on their characterizations of contemporary forms of service learning but on its origin as well. Daynes and Longo (2004) contest the widely-accepted idea that John Dewey is the 'founding figure of service learning' (8) and suggest, instead, that the tradition originates with Jane Addams and Chicago's Hull House. Boundaries in Syracuse and PAR projects more generally model Jane Addams approach, which Daynes and Longo suggest has been forgotten by contemporary practitioners of service learning (2004: 9-10). Their argument has important ramifications for a historical placement of our own project in relation to service learning and participatory action research in two ways. First, Addams believed in the creativity and unpredictability of community-university collaboration. Daynes and Longo suggest, however, that contemporary practices of service learning at universities diverge from Addams' notion of the public sphere:

> Progressive-era academics increasingly described education, society, and democracy in a formal way, as scientific systems: predictable, classifiable, understandable through experimental study, and best led by experts. Addams rejected this notion entirely. Instead, she understood education, society, and democracy as creative systems: unpredictable, understandable through experience and reflection, and open to leaders of all sorts (2004, 10).

Daynes and Longo suggest that this belief has been overshadowed by contemporary university practices that aim to quantify in the assessment of outcomes of service learning, teaching, and scholarship writ large (2004, 9). Second, at the root of Addams' work in Chicago was the intersection of gender and geography. She believed that women's labor should be brought into the public sphere in ways that would democratize and challenge citizenship and education.

For the teaching team of the Syracuse course, these critiques of service learning were paired with concerns about the benefit to students involved in service learning projects. The opportunity for students to have organized involvement in

community service can offer experience and insight rich with potential, but this potential remains unfulfilled if connections between practice and critical theory are not maintained. Paolo Freire and other scholars of critical pedagogy elaborate frameworks for maximizing the learning potential of education integrated with everyday practical experience. Freire contrasted a pedagogy for liberation with a 'banking pedagogy' wherein teacher-expert imparts knowledge upon subjects (Freire, 1972). The banking method positions students as empty vessels, whereas liberation pedagogy treats students' first-hand experiences as the foundation of education. With liberation as a purpose of education, both content and process are politicized with the transformative effect of students engaged in an ongoing cycle of action and reflection (Freire 1972, 1974).   Shor (1992) elaborates on transformative learning in which 'generative issues are found in the unsettled intersections of personal life and society. Based in such experiences as voting, working, housing, community activity, they are student-centered foundations for problem-solving.' Community involvement offers a source for generative themes that can become the driving nexus integrating academic texts, personal experience, and community contexts.

While the intentions, principles, and origins of service learning remain the subject of debate, critiques of some of the contemporary practices associated with service learning converge and provide a foundation for explaining why and how we sought to invoke principles of participatory action research. We believe that PAR models and feminist pedagogy pick up where service learning may have left off. PAR offers the possibility of returning to Jane Addams' ideals which are as follows: process matters; the unpredictability of creative processes are necessary for collaboration; and only collaborations that deconstruct hierarchical forms of knowledge production offer potential for transformation in realms of citizenship and participation in social change (Daynes and Longo, 2004)

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Participatory action research: from 'service' to participation in social change

While debates about whether service learning should be 'charitable' or involve 'political activism' continue (Daynes and Longo, 2004, 10-11), PAR has always begun within the political realm of social movements. Fals-Borda (1991, 7) suggests that participants in PAR are involved in 'learning to know and recognize themselves as a means of creating people's power, and the internal and external mechanisms of countervailing power.' PAR therefore entails an iterative process of action and reflection, one that challenges the participants to reflect critically on

their awareness of self while engaging collectively in action to transform broader social relations.

In participatory action research, researchers are co-investigators with local residents and members of community groups, collaboratively researching questions of importance to community participants. 'Prompted by diverse questions and tensions, individuals enter into a fluid process, searching for difference, encountering problems and doubts, and joining forces with others in the complex struggle to build self-reliance and re-humanize their world' (Smith 1997: 6). Building relationships and sharing power in the creative process of collaborative research, participants ideally gain first-hand experience with the challenges of inequity and social transformation. The goal of resolving community needs combines with that of 'conscientization', a 'moment of disintegration and reintegration when a person or group (often suddenly) understands elements of social oppression and injustice' (Smith, 1997: 214).

PAR distinguishes itself as a research framework in both its politicized research goals and its more democratic methodology. It aims not only to engage students in reflective or critical learning, but in transformative participation in the social sphere. PAR abandons a commitment to political abstention and commits to 'investigate the most serious social, economic, political, and environmental problems confronting the most powerless and marginalized groups in society' (Reardon and Shields, 1997: 23; quoted in Lewis, 2004).

While problematic in other ways that we outline below, PAR offers potential to address some of the shortcomings of service learning. Boundaries in Syracuse sought to engage text with experience outside of the classroom in order to transcend service models in which students log hours as volunteers without critical reflection. For us a key component of engaging with PAR models was to shift from the paradigm of 'service' to a paradigm of participation: to join, participate in, and bring additional research capacity to movements for social justice already happening around us in Syracuse. PAR positioned students not as passive volunteers but as critical scholars allying with community members as co-investigators. As a learning process, we hoped that the unfolding relationships between students, community partners, and the teaching team would prove to be a generative source for critical reflection. Partnering with community leaders as fellow subjects, and placing ourselves as foci of inquiry, would challenge us not to remove ourselves to a comfortable distance from some abstracted 'other'. The principle of participation derives from recognition that the research production process itself has great political consequence, and participation in the process has potentially transformative possibilities.

Participatory action research emerged out of social movements in the global North and South. Its historical roots have been traced to diverse sources, including the 1969 Chicano student manifesto *El Plan de Santa Barbara* (Ochoa and Ochoa, 2004), Tanzanian subsistence farmers (Reardon, 1998), and the Hull House in late 1800s Chicago (Robinson, 2000). In 1969, at the University of California at Santa Barbara, a statewide meeting of students drew out objectives for Chicano studies, *El Plan de Santa Barbara,* which called to 'dissolve the academy-community dichotomy' (Ochoa and Ochoa, 2004, 61). During the same decade Tanzanian subsistence farmers are reported to have created mutual self help knowledge exchange systems that provided an alternative to top-down technology transfers from the global North (Reardon, 2000). The Hull House politicized residents of Chicago's tenements in the 1800s and is claimed as a historical antecedent to both service learning (Daynes and Longo, 2004) and PAR (Robinson, 2000). With university faculty and students, the center organized 'medical care, schooling, arts and culture celebrations' as well as advocating for labor and immigrant rights and paving neighborhood roads (Robinson, 2000). The history of these antecedents is dispersed and incomplete, but its commonalities important to note. In each case, the purpose of research was to address social problems, and the methodology one of collaborative investigation that foregrounded the knowledge of those most affected by the problems.   Each case confronted hierarchies between researchers and community partners.

It is important to differentiate between *action research* and *participatory action research*.   Action research seeks to achieve social change by producing *findings* that support strategic action for change, whereas PAR politicizes the research production *process* as a base from which power relations are transformed. Action research orients research objectives toward relevance to organized social change efforts.   It provides an alternative to research that lacks accessibility to broader society, and critiques 'articles and books of self-serving theory of limited use that often is only intelligible to scholars within one's own circle' (Lisman, 1997: 84, quoted in Robinson, 2000).[5]   Action research does not necessarily invoke participatory methods and therefore retains an extractive approach that preserves the professional researchers' power over process and does not realize the empowering potential of opening up the research process itself to popular participation. Like action research, *participatory* action research also confronts social problems as an objective, but opens the research design process up to collaboration with community partners.   This might include planning, data collection, analysis, and distribution processes as collaborative undertakings.

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[5] Action research is noted for producing more relevant, accurate research that is more likely to be implemented because its production leads to greater political consensus surrounding its results (e.g., Greenwood and Levin, 1998 or Reardon, 1998).

PAR puts into practice less exclusive stances about 'what knowledge counts'. The validation of non-academic knowledge does not simply mean that there is important knowledge to be extracted from local residents, but rather that participants must be given the power to make decisions in guiding the research process. Greenwood and Levin (1998, 4) summarize the PAR process as the moment when 'the professional researcher and the stakeholders define the problems to be examined, co-generate relevant knowledge about them, learn and execute social research techniques, take actions, and interpret the results'.

Once the ownership of research by a professional researcher is broken and the process opened to participation, critical questions arise. *Who is participating? Who produces knowledge? How do they share authority? What is the purpose of the process?* Such questions reappear continuously in the surprising, mundane, and messy space of research methodology. After detailing the design of the course and the opportunities and challenges we encountered, we begin to answer these questions in our conclusions.

From theory to practice: the design and implementation of the class

Geographers have grown more interested in PAR in recent years (Cameron and Gibson, 2005; Pain, 2004), engagement that builds on the momentum of Bill Bunge's (1971) geographical expeditions in 1960s Detroit and critical geographies that have developed in the decades since (Merrifield, 1995). Our project began with friendship and intellectual companionship between a feminist geographer (Mountz) and a feminist architect (Brown). For both, the class served as an opportunity to extend into teaching those ideals valued in field research (working closely with community organizations and social movements underway, bringing together different people and ideas, documenting activism alongside injustice). The class also grew out of our own experiences growing up in communities where universities seemed to hide behind walls and not participate in local issues. We believed that students should experience cities 'on the ground' and organized the course to facilitate hands-on learning opportunities. Students then created three-dimensional representations to share findings in a public gallery in ways that not only enhance learning, but offer something of use to local groups in their efforts to achieve social justice.

The project became possible through a collaborative, organic assembly of resources on and off campus. The instructors wrote a proposal and were awarded $5,000 from the Syracuse University Vision Grant for innovative teaching. These (and additional, smaller) funds supported work of teaching and research assistants, project materials, and gallery space to exhibit culminating projects. We also

benefited from the opportunity for collaboration with the Mary Ann Shaw Center for Public and Community Service (CPCS), which facilitates development of community-based service learning and research experiences for the University.

CPCS joined us to challenge some of the conventions of service learning. The Center's programming fosters 'further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. To facilitate the development of mutually beneficial relationships, CPCS works to create successful community partnerships through carefully matching students' interests and community needs' (Center for Public and Community Service, 2006). After ten years of sustained work in community-university collaboration, CPCS had established relationships and a working knowledge of local organizations and proved instrumental in initial networking with organizations.

Rather than target specific organizations with which to collaborate at the outset, the *Boundaries in Syracuse* project began, instead, with a series of broad questions. What boundaries are at work in city residents' daily lives that inhibit and enable mobility? Where and how do these boundaries manifest in the urban landscape, and how do we negotiate them? How do our identities influence our engagement with the city? What role does government play in cities? How do boundaries shape the identities of neighborhoods and experiences of urban residents? CPCS helped us to identify community organizations that were likely to engage these questions through their work. Every year, CPCS hosts a large meeting attended by researchers and community organizations interested in collaborating through service learning. When we presented these questions at the meeting in spring 2005, city residents spoke of diverse boundaries. One structure mentioned frequently was I-81, an elevated inter-state highway dividing the university's hilltop classrooms and towering sports complex from neighboring public housing projects where unemployment and police roadblocks are commonplace. The University, with its billion-dollar endowment, stands out on the city's economic landscape marked by decades of deindustrialization and capital flight.[6]

Boundaries thus spoke powerfully to community members in attendance, and a line of people approached us about potential collaboration when we were invited to network afterward. There were more organizations interested than we could engage in dialogue. Rocheleau and Slocum inquire about the first contact, asking as researchers 'Did anyone invite us, and if so, who?' (Slocum et al., 1995, 21). In this case we were subsequently invited by several non-profit organizations

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[6] See 'Greater Syracuse Economic Growth Council Resource Center': http://www.syracusecentral.com/business_resources/growth_council.htm. Last accessed 30 September 2007.

to talk more. We hoped to work with organizations whose mission intersected with the issues our course would investigate, focusing on the nexus of gender, architecture, and geography. We then attended a round-table discussion on-campus with interested organizations and follow-up meetings off-campus at community agencies. These served as brainstorming sessions beginning with a representative from the organization describing the work provided for the community. In turn, we explained our hopes for the class and connections between course themes and organizational work. We asked potential partners to share their ideas for research projects they would do if they had ample resources and capacity.

While CPCS told us that this more abstract process of course development was the method they preferred, the considerable amount of time involved meant that only a a few CPCS academic community experiences had developed this way during their time on campus.   Slowly and organically, research questions and projects emerged through dialogue.   We asked to collaborate with those organizations that identified with the themes, demonstrated enthusiasm for collaboration, and offered some capacity to sustain collaboration. We then wrote one-page descriptions of the projects and circulated these to community partners for amendment and approval. We left these open-ended so that student researchers and community partners would have opportunities through collaboration in the ensuing months to develop the projects in ways that were feasible, capitalizing on the strengths of group members and opportunities for research.

The seminar met once a week for three hours, beginning in late August. On the first day, we distributed the project descriptions as well as a survey that invited students to list their preferred projects and to describe their own histories, skill sets, and hopes that would facilitate involvement in specific projects. On the basis of written responses, the instructors assembled five groups. We aimed to create groups that included students with distinct demographic and disciplinary backgrounds. The class itself drew a diverse group of students from geography, architecture, women's studies, sociology, landscape architecture, education, and communication and cultural rhetoric. Some of these students grew up in different parts of Syracuse, while others had arrived more recently. They brought with them a range of skills and experiences that we aimed to channel through participation in projects. We assigned each group to work with one of two teaching assistants throughout the semester in order to promote sustained contact and capitalize on the community involvement of teaching assistants.

On the second day of class, representatives from the five organizations visited and presented their work. In subsequent meetings the newly-formed student groups and their community partners decided upon research goals and methods. They planned, implemented, and modified research activities as problems arose. The research findings and reflections on the process were presented in December at

a public forum featuring installations of diverse media. Groups also passed along their reports, presentations, and models to community partners for further discussion and dissemination.

We identified organizing themes for course content: boundary-making on the urban landscape, gendered labor histories of deindustrialization, urban renewal and displacement, sexual identity and exclusion, and art and the city. Weekly, we sought to discuss conceptual readings, such as Dolores Hayden's (1981) 'What would a non-sexist city look like?', and link these to the research projects underway. Timing was a perpetual challenge, and most weeks we stayed in the classroom well beyond the time when class was supposed to have ended, either continuing discussion or responding to dilemmas that had arisen in the research projects.

The class connected students to the city in ways that go well beyond a typical course by bringing community partners into the classroom and students into the city for hands-on experiential learning. They began by studying Syracuseans' past in order to understand contemporary spaces of the city. Course content included lessons on the architectural design of downtown buildings and theatres, the labor histories built into the residential and work spaces of the city, and the geography of the region. Students studied the past and present of public housing and public transportation in the city, as well as the history of Syracuse University's evolving role in the broader community. Most seminars rely on textual and visual representations of the city that serve as the medium through which the professor brings the city to the students. Inevitably, this learning involves a degree of abstraction. Students react to materials through reading, writing, and discussion. Or students make field trips, which risk making poverty, sex work, and the cities that host them the objects of teaching tourism with students as voyeurs. This class enabled students to learn about urban geography on the ground through the process of creation. The class was as much an interdisciplinary reading of the world as it was a reading of the word (Freire, 1972).

The projects: creative contributions to social change

The organizations worked in the areas of women's access to health care, refugee resettlement, neighborhood housing development, access to education in the arts, and safe spaces of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons in the larger community. Three students worked with Planned Parenthood to gather information on the health needs and access to care of recent immigrants and refugees to Syracuse. Five students worked with the Community Folk Art Center to assess five potential sites identified for the opening of a storefront after-school

program on the south side. Four students worked with the SU LGBT Resource Center to investigate non-gendered and single stall bathrooms and their accessibility to transgender people on campus. They also interviewed SU students about safe and unsafe social spaces in the city of Syracuse. Five students studied the 'transitional' Sacred Heart neighborhood west of downtown to help Home Headquarters, a housing development organization, to create a resident-driven plan for neighborhood improvement. Four students worked alongside the Northside CYO Refugee Resettlement Agency with a group of recently arrived Liberian women to understand the barriers to their mobility around the city. They focused especially on women's access to daycare, job opportunities, affordable housing, and public transportation.

Students made incredible personal commitments to the collaborative research process.[7] While the course structured the projects in terms of thematic learning and production deadlines including a final public presentation and exhibition, students decided in collaboration with community partners the content, questions, and style of their materials. The structure of the class fostered collaborative, communicative, collective actions (though never without challenges, elaborated below). These efforts worked to destabilize hierarchies among students, bringing different personalities and abilities to the fore at different moments throughout the term (e.g., the ability to map, the ability to communicate cross-culturally, the ability to write, to build, to interview, to identify). As instructors, we utilized training as group facilitators to help the collaborative process through which students learned and created. Teaching assistants also facilitated with crisis-management, communication with community organizations, and weekly engagement with student journals.

Meanwhile, collaboration with the organizations enabled and supported relationships between the students and marginalized groups in the community. The university/community divide within and beyond Syracuse has been discussed often over the past several years. The Boundaries class raised issues around this schism and simultaneously began to work through some of the divisions between the university and community. The invitations to work with well-established organizations opened doors for engagement across deeply racialized and classed divides within Syracuse. These working relationships also deconstructed easy divisions between students and community residents. Students *are* community residents, and some of the students in this class were long-term or lifetime residents of Syracuse. The course therefore provoked discussion of the distinct and multifarious ways that we are all members of the community as parents, residents,

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[7] In course evaluations, students suggested that Boundaries in Syracuse next be offered as a 6-credit rather than a 3-credit course.

volunteers, patients and clients, students and teachers, immigrants, citizens, tax payers, pedestrians, to name but a few. We carry our histories with us and participate in and are excluded from the city in our daily lives, and there exist an infinite number of ways to conceptualize membership, belonging, difference, and alienation.

The class successfully brought students out of the classroom and into the city, requiring use of the knowledge learned in the classroom in the field and vice versa. Because of the specificity of the projects, many critical issues discussed in class were foregrounded in the different student group research projects. Conversely, different groups were empowered to lead discussion in class on days that addressed their research area specifically. Students working with Planned Parenthood, for example, brought issues relating to gender and women's access to health resources to the table. The project also raised issues surrounding how research works, what to do when difficulties arise in research and how to present information that may or may not be in alignment with the community partner. They grappled with the issue of silence around women's access to health care, and worked to represent this silence in their final installation by inviting those in attendance to write on posters presented.

The group that collaborated with the refugee resettlement agency accompanied recently resettled families on their daily errands, witnessing their interactions with institutions. A Caucasian student in this group passionately recalled the way a hospital staff member talking with a Liberian woman suddenly changed attitude as soon as the student walked up and joined the interaction. This illuminated for this student and the class the landscapes of institutional power in the city where race and nationality intersect.

The group working with the Community Folk Art Center used their mappings of the city's racial, economic, and spatial boundaries to help determine a location for a satellite facility to better serve the south side community's access to after-school arts education programs. Listening to residents' experiences of crossing boundaries of safety, access, and belonging, students grounded theoretical understandings of landscapes of power in the practical exercise of locating a new community center.

Students working with the LGBT Resource Center investigated gendered spaces of inclusion and exclusion at the scales of university and city. The goal was to 'map queer space, mobility, community, social services, and visibility in the city.' They were able to meet, learn from, and join established and nascent activist groups around campus. One of the outcomes of the research was a map of single stall non-gendered bathrooms that would be publicized for people seeking such a space. In order to accomplish this, students networked with on- and off-campus

activist and social LGBT groups and asked for participation in the campus-wide mapping project. The group also conducted interviews with fellow students about their experiences with gendered spaces and university bathrooms. One interview had particular impact when the interviewee explained that gender-neutral bathrooms are not desirable for some transgender individuals who want to have their gender validated. The information challenged the group's primary activity of mapping non-gendered bathrooms, as they realized that both gendered and non-gendered bathrooms are desirable. They focused on mapping existing single-stall bathrooms and advocating for the construction of additional single-stall bathrooms.

By working collaboratively, students learned first hand of the struggles involved in social change and were responsible for representing and working through these struggles in the research process.

The importance and opportunities of PAR as pedagogy

The integration of participatory action research into classroom curricula broadens the basis for generative themes by laying a framework for 'meaning making' outside the classroom. Small identifies four aspects of the transformative effects on participant researchers: 'increased ownership of the findings, more opportunities to reflect upon them, and greater commitment to seeing that they are used,' as well as increased capacity of the participants to conduct their own research, which enables them to better tackle future problems (Small, 1995, 944). The effects of the Boundaries projects on students reflected Small's elements and others.[8]

Class readings, meanwhile, offered theories of how race, class, and gendered social structures shape, and are reproduced by, the built environment. Lisa, for example, held a job in Syracuse that required that she drive through Syracuse's southside in the middle of the night. She routinely drove through red lights for fear of being harassed if she stopped at a light. During the course of the class she realized the ways in which gender, race, and class intersectionality prompted this mode of engagement with the neighborhood. Her writing shows how she integrated these concepts into the lens through which she sees her everyday activities.

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[8] Hammond, Hicks, Kalman and Miller (2005) offer a stimulating discussion of the implementation of PAR as pedagogy in a class on PAR.

Drawing on Freire and Shor's (1992) parlance of 'problem-posers', the engagement with community partners about research and methods posed an evolving set of 'problems' rich with potential for transformation. The visceral learning invoked by such processes was evident in an experience of the student group focusing on LGBT issues. The students were so energized by revelations in interviews and support of the LGBT community that they became even more involved in collaborations. The creation of an online survey that others could access to help in the bathroom mapping process extended networks of collaboration. Another student in the class, Kelly, identified an associated change in consciousness, writing, 'I understand there is an obvious difference in gender, but I never realized before how much of it is actually made and reproduced in our everyday lives' (Student journal).

Another aspect of learning involved the connections students made between micro and macro scales. The group conducting research with families with refugee status compared the migration from their country of origin with the migrations they made on a daily basis, noting the ways their mobility is shaped by institutions and the means by which they navigate surroundings. The group examining housing issues contrasted national trends and dynamics within the city and within neighborhoods, with one student noting, 'Nationwide, the home-ownership rate is about 66 percent, while in Syracuse it is approximately 40 percent. However, as I have found out, this varies greatly between neighborhoods' (Student journal). This understanding of the relation between micro and macro scales reflects more nuanced analysis of social processes, documenting and potentially disrupting boundaries within and surrounding city and nation.

One of the most striking differences between this class and others we have taught was the eagerness with which students approached their work. Throughout the semester, they were organizing community meetings, spending weekends going door-to-door, and creatively extending projects. Gustavo de Roux (1991:44) describes a process in Valle del Cauca, Colombia, with PAR as a research methodology that would 'free up energy for action… so that the people would link their rational conclusions to profound emotions.' In the Boundaries class, Frank spoke of an emotional shift that drove his heightened engagement with his studies:

> I don't know who else has noticed, but it has become virtually impossible for me to engage myself in that which I am not personally and deeply invested. If it's passionless I cannot [participate], I think this was the issue that began to short-circuit my academic drive (Student journal).

Shor (1992) writes of the 'performance strike' as a depressed state of student engagement that can be an unconscious response to forms of pedagogy that

ask students to 'answer questions not question answers' (26). Using PAR to place the community in the classroom and the classroom in the community validated a realm of experience in which the students could both question the answers offered in texts, and try out their own answers. If becoming a citizen is to 'take part in meaning making, articulating purposes, carrying out plans, evaluating results' (Shor, 1992, 18), the promise of PAR is to produce more active citizens through practice.

Collaboration through a creative process facilitated alliances and collective action. Students working with the LGBT Resource Center came to understand how community members and students overcame barriers in their daily lives to find spaces in the city that were safe and welcoming places of self-expression and social engagement. Students working with the Community Folk Art Center came to better understand the microgeography of neighborhoods, schools and public transportation to assess the most accessible locations for a satellite storefront office for after-school programs. Students working with the recently resettled Liberian women and children mapped their time-space paths to work, school, and daycare and suggested a non-literate bus map to make public transit more accessible to new residents.

This was a humbling class. We did a lot – perhaps more – to deconstruct some of the social hierarchies at work among professors, students, researchers, and non-academic community members, than we did necessarily to subvert the boundaries that we documented on the ground in the city. Feminist methods augmented PAR by encouraging students and faculty to challenge hierarchies and masculinist modes of engagement in the classroom. Students led class discussions with their own questions stemming from readings and dilemmas confronted in community projects.

A sense of belonging to something larger grew. During the two years since the course ended, we have witnessed many projects that former students developed by extending research initiated in the course. Some used the projects as the beginnings of thesis and dissertation research. Others continued to work with community organizations on a volunteer basis; some even joined as employees. The projects intersected in exciting ways with other initiatives on campus, and students have been able to carry work in the boundaries class into participation in other initiatives. The LGBT Resource Center succeeded in persuading the University administration to designate 25 single stall bathrooms and additional ones in any new buildings on campus.[9]

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[9] As this paper goes to publication, they continue to struggle over how the bathrooms will be marked.

While presenting a time management challenge to everyone, course evaluations, community partners, and those who attended the gallery installations and presentations reported that the outcome was worth the time and energy invested. Community partners voiced appreciation for the work and hope that they would be included in the next iteration of the class.   Course instructors witnessed the manifestation of research interests in local contexts as concepts taught in class were tested and adapted by students.   Students sank their teeth into 'real-world' problems and applied technical and intellectual problem-solving skills.   Teaching and research assistants provided support on the front line with conflict resolution and advising skills as they assisted students with projects.   We all joined, learned from, and contributed to social movements thriving in Syracuse. The class fostered relationships among students and faculty and between community partners and students.   Students and community partners worked across differences in race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, faith, language, legal status to work together toward intersecting goals of inclusion, accessibility, and social justice.

The challenges of PAR as pedagogy

Collaborative, community-engaged work takes more time and resources than 'normal' teaching. While there was much to celebrate in this course, there was also much to learn from, and we offer here some of those lessons. Several methodological and ethical dilemmas involved relationships between students and partner organizations, and some underlying assumptions.   For example, the students working on housing issues in the Sacred Heart community in west Syracuse devoted the semester to interviewing residents and working with community organizations to imagine a safer future for everyone in the neighborhood. This vision involved equal access to housing opportunities. Yet they were told by some members of community groups to only interview property owners. This decision would exclude those residents most severely impacted by discriminatory housing policies and perpetuate a powerful class division. The teaching assistant (Moore) supported the students in strategizing how to negotiate with organizations' members. The students created modes of participation with more inclusive measures for a diversity of voices within the community to be heard.   It was clear that a primary role of PAR facilitators, in this case the professors and teaching assistants, was to present a range of methodologies, critically discuss their strengths and weaknesses, and to attempt to overcome class bias, in this case. This focus on the unsettled relationships between student, organization, and broader community prompted ongoing problem-solving.   We often discussed these issues in the classroom and connected them with course readings.

As an organization dedicated to reproductive rights, Planned Parenthood expressed concern for privacy and was hesitant to share information needed to move the project forward. Many meetings and conversations ensued focusing on how research works and ways to allow the project to evolve and change as needed. For example, the students were at first researching whether there were any refugee groups in the city not receiving adequate female healthcare. They soon realized that these needs were being met by organizations other than Planned Parenthood. An interesting turn of events occurred through the refugee resettlement group when it became apparent that the adolescent daughters of refugee women had many unanswered questions that Planned Parenthood could play a role in helping to answer.

While these organizations had needs and interests that were not always necessarily aligned with the ideas and ideals of students, a flexible and critical research process directed partnerships toward research that could be both useful and critically engaged. Without the organizations as interested intermediaries, it would have been unlikely that students develop relationships across some of the racialized, class-based, and other barriers between students and other community members. The housing group ultimately did interview renters, and the reproductive rights group redirected their research toward a focus on the gap between the organization and the communities the organization was aiming to serve.

The inclusive collaboration called for in the PAR process produces a generative and critical pedagogy, but it also poses significant challenges to participants. Reardon tells students conducting PAR projects to expect 'to follow a nonlinear course throughout the investigation as the problem being studied is 'reframed' to accommodate new knowledge that emerges' (Reardon, 1998: 59). This flexible and sometimes unpredictable process frustrates some students, especially early in the semester.

> We have some ideas, but no one really knows what we are aiming for and how we are going to do it. It is hard to make a plan of action when we don't know what we are studying. I feel like we don't have time to get this wrong. (Student journal)

Similarly, we realized that we had too many objectives for the course and never enough time to accomplish them all. Because important conversations arose in class about insights gleaned and challenges faced in the research projects, we were rarely able to discuss all of the readings assigned, which frustrated students and instructors. We realized eventually that we really needed two classes per week – one to do the intellectual work of reading and carefully discussing readings, teaching urban, geographic, architectural and feminist theories and another to deal with the sheer volume of management of the research projects with the community

partners. Time constraints proved a recurring challenge. Life does not operate on a semester system, and the weekly schedules of faculty, community organizations, and students rarely overlap. The non-linear PAR research process that sometimes frustrates students, however, is an important pedagogical element of power sharing.

Time devoted by instructors and students well exceeded the standard credits allotted for teaching and taking one course.   The management dilemma of coordinating community partners, RA/TAs, instructors, and students was unusually laborious.   The sheer volume of interaction, coordination, and communication required to bridge together students, community groups, funding bodies, host departments, instructors and assistants proved overwhelming and among the greatest challenges. Everyone struggled to maintain the extra labor and find extra resources required. This involved grant-writing and community meetings, crisis-management, gallery rental and installation, and donations of time, energy, and self. The conventions of scheduling and apportioning credit in University systems, meanwhile, seemed at odds with the time-intensive process of teaching service-oriented classes (see Butterwick and Dawson, 2005).

Barbara Bushouse (2005) found that service learning projects also demand considerable resources of community non-profit organizations.   The refugee resettlement organization we partnered with, for example, faced its heaviest time of resettlement during the semester due to the federal policy cycle at the same time that the class ran. They requested limited engagement with students during these months, and we moved forward creatively, respecting these requests and frontloading contact with the community organization at the very start of the semester.

Furthermore, the work of community engagement is gendered in multiple ways. To take our class as an example, fourteen of twenty-one students were women; three of five teaching and research assistants hired at different points in time were women; as were both instructors. It seemed to us anecdotally that beyond and in addition to the Boundaries project, many of our colleagues engaged in community-based scholarship were often women, people of color, and untenured.[10]

Shauna Butterwick and Jane Dawson (2005) write of the many contradictory ways that feminist scholars who do activist scholarship must engage with the tenure and promotion process. Often, they argue, the design of the tenure

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[10] We consulted with the CPCS and university administration to find out if these data were available. While not yet available as this paper goes to press, both parties expressed an interest in collecting these data.

portfolio entails silencing what might appear to be an overly heavy 'service' load; one that is devalued in an environment where funded research and publications count most. Additionally, the work is gendered and racialized in that it is work taken up disproportionately by women and scholars who are persons of color. As Chancellor Cantor implements the 'Scholarship-in-Action' model at SU (Syracuse University, 2006), the issue of how to incorporate such time-intensive teaching into tenure and promotion policies remains an ongoing discussion. While the instructors were not given a course release to devote extra time to this class, they were interviewed subsequently by a subcommittee of the faculty senate about the time commitments required to teach the class (see Phelps, 2007; Syracuse University, 2007). If tenure and promotion policies are not altered to support community-engaged work, then university and community are at risk of losing those most committed to the process, which in turn threatens the sustained relationships required to do this kind of work. The gendering of community engagement as we outline it here suggests a fascinating return to and re-reading of Jane Addams' starting point that women's labor move from private to public spheres. Albeit from distinct starting points, we agree with Daynes and Longo (2004) that conceptual and practical understandings of community engagement take the issue of gender more seriously.

Conclusions

We have sought in this paper to document a pedagogical process that implements PAR, to share its successes and challenges, and to exemplify the experiences that facilitated that sense of critical commitment. The experiences outlined support the conclusion that PAR is a vital pedagogical process that addresses crucial shortcomings of some versions of service learning. The principles of critical pedagogy provide a theoretical basis for linking PAR as research methodology with progressive classroom pedagogy. The impact of such learning was evident in Boundaries students' critical analysis of their everyday surroundings, scaled understandings of social processes, and vibrant engagement with learning and social justice.

Students and instructors became more invested and engaged with education and its role in the community around them. Students and instructors showed unusually high levels of motivation, developed critiques of their personal positions in stratified social structures, and made connections between the multiple scales at which social relations are reproduced. The course texts enabled the theorizing of experience, including articulation of the racialized, gendered, classed, and sexed reproductions of difference and how identities are shaped through social structures and reproduced by the constructed environment.

We now return to questions posed earlier: *Who is participating? Who produces knowledge? How do they share authority? What is the purpose of the process?* Destabilization of power structures with feminist pedagogy created an environment of shared authority. The class challenged knowledge creation and access to the process. The students were held more accountable in the learning process, not empty vessels waiting to be filled but active participants in the process. The success of the class relied on the students' active engagement on all levels – readings, discussions, journals, research projects and final public presentations. The professors designed the class in such as way as to engage students in alternative processes of research design and knowledge production. Students were expected to contribute to the production of knowledge on a weekly basis. The purpose of the process was to challenge the service learning model and to create a class that engaged the city at varying scales. This required the students to be out in the city so they could experience first hand how boundaries affected people's lives. At the end of the class, students passed on all findings and materials to community organizations that in turn used information for planning, grant-writing, programming, and advocacy.

The Boundaries course generated a multitude of experiences that unfolded in spontaneous and unpredictable ways and included a wide array of participants across communities in Syracuse. The course became a defining part of all of our lives. Emotional anguish, excitement, and endurance characterized the experience, if for no other reason than we felt part of something important in the city in which we lived, worked, studied, and taught. The energy and camaraderie among students, instructors, TAs and RAs was palpable. Personal transformations were sometimes evident in the classroom, but more often outside the spaces of the classroom in community meetings and projects, in confessions and tears in our offices, or in the space of some often very angst-ridden weekly journal-writing. Students and community members collaborated to produce knowledge in order to contribute to social change, if in small but important ways.

Students of architecture and geography moved beyond the models and maps they are accustomed to crafting as lone designers. Mapping and design processes became more informed through critical engagement with the community around them. Although the end result was unlike a studio design project, the interdisciplinary collaborations focused on issues that influence the way space is designed and used. In fact, this class made evident how often architects and geographers are pawns in larger political and economic structures. In order to alter and change these systems, they must be aware of how the system works, who typically has power, and how this landscape of power might be documented and disrupted.

Our experience offers inroads into how PAR works in the classroom. It is an important pedagogical model because the student becomes responsible for the application of ideas from class to what they are learning outside of the classroom, and for bringing this back into the classroom to share with the group. It challenges the more typical classroom structure through in-class group discussions, visiting speakers, weekly group check-ins and journal entries, and a final public presentation. With many different ways to engage, students had multiple and different opportunities to demonstrate learning.

We now face the challenging issue of sustainability to support work like this and involve others without having to continue to seek funding each time. We are excited and anxious to disseminate, promote, and sustain this alternative model of collaborative teaching that moves beyond the service learning model. By reflecting on this example of 'scholarship in action' we aim to contribute to discussions geared toward broadening the definition of scholarship. PAR as a method to collaborate in creative endeavors offers an exciting way forward in the university classroom. We hope to join forces with instructors and students experimenting with this model.

Acknowledgements

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