

Living Your Education: Field Schools as Pedagogical and Research Enterprises

Jean Scandlyn PhD¹, John Brett PhD¹, Sharry Erzinger DrPH²

Departments of ¹Anthropology and ²Health and Behavioral Science, University of Colorado Denver

Introduction

Pedagogy of Ethnographic Field Schools

- Dominant models:
 - Students conduct independent “mini-ethnographies” within the context of the field school;
 - Students participate as researchers on larger faculty research project.
- Emerging Alternate Model:
 - Collaborative participation with community members and local NGOs;
 - Students conduct original research in teams.



UCDHSC Field School in Mondaña, Ecuador

The emerging alternate model is philosophically grounded in participatory and collaborative research and framed in Rapid Assessment Process (RAP) methodology.

- Requires direct engagement with research question;
- Requires broad knowledge of possible methods;
- Requires collaboration with community members to develop research questions, collect and analyze data, and present findings.
- Requires a disciplined approach to research because research teams must present their findings to the community at the end of their field stay;
- Requires intensive teamwork to coordinate research design, data collection, analysis, and presentation of the findings.

Processes



Classroom topics

- Sustainability
- Ecuadorian society and tropic ecology
- Rapid Assessment Process (RAP)
- Principles of collaborative research
- Team building activities

Fieldwork Process

- Two teams collect and analyze data on distinct research projects: sustainable agriculture and community health status;
 - Iterative analysis, model building and testing.
- Work Schedule
- Morning data collection sessions;
 - Afternoon data analysis by individual data collection teams;
 - Daily research meetings among data collection teams;
 - Regular review of emerging findings with Ecuadorian collaborators;
 - Twice weekly presentations of emerging findings to alternate team for critique and clarification.



Presentation

- US and Ecuadorian students co-present findings in public forum at the field site
- Continued analysis in US and broader dissemination of research findings
 - Four professional meetings
 - Website
 - Final report



Orientation to Field Site

- Three days of intensive orientation
 - Complete tour of region and all facilities, including surrounding rain forest reserve;
 - Discuss and redefine sustainability with Ecuadorian students;
 - Finalize research questions;
 - Define research teams and process.



Outcomes

Pedagogical

- A more intensive engagement with research as students have primary responsibility for research process and results;
- Experience with team-based research, creating broader awareness of research perspectives relative to the standard lone anthropologist model;
- Development of collaborative research skills typical of much international development research and practice;
- Professional level contributions to students' CVs;
- Direct engagement with the difficulties and rewards inherent in the ethnographic research enterprise;
- Exploration of inequalities and power dynamics inherent in the ethnographic encounter;
- Benefits to undergraduate students from working with more advanced graduate students and to graduate students from teaching and demonstrating content and skills to less experienced undergraduates;
- Benefits to Ecuadorian and US students through mutual goal-setting and research practice across cultures.

Research

- Demonstration of RAP and participatory models as basis for field school;
- Research conducted, data analyzed, and preliminary results presented to the community within two weeks.
- Documentation and map of community health concerns and needs;
- Map of Sustainable Agriculture project;
- Evaluation of Sustainable Agriculture project in year two;
- Establishment of long-term research agenda for subsequent courses;
- Sustained engagement with research in Ecuador and upon return to US;
- Research products of genuine value to host community and partnering organizations.

References

- Beebe, J. (2001). *Rapid Assessment Process: An Introduction*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira.
- Carney, D. (2002). *Sustainable Livelihoods Approach: Progress and Possibilities for Change*. DFID.
- Chambers, R., Conway, G. (1991). *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: Practical Concepts for the 21st Century* (http://www.livelihoods.org/static/rchambers_NN13.html).
- Minkler, M. and N. Wallerstein. (2003). *Introduction to Community Based Participatory Research. Community Based Participatory Research for Health*. M. Minkler and N. Wallerstein. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass: 3-26.
- Handwerker, W. Penn. (2001). *Quick Ethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira.