Learning through Story: Using Narrative Inquiry in a Graduate-Level Food Security Course

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• Food Security course objectives, topics, & assignments
• Narrative Inquiry & the practitioner narrative assignment
• Narrative themes and student insights
• Implications

A collaboration between NC State University, Virginia Tech, West Virginia University, and Community Stakeholders. Funded by a 2011 USDA NIFA-AFRI Grant (Award No. 2011-68004-30079)
• Interdisciplinary exploration of issues related to food security and the emerging discourse(s) of food systems

• Address the interconnectedness of the complex issues related to food security—as a “wicked problem” (Hamm, 2009)

• Educational & development agendas at the heart of this dialogue

• The Appalachian Foodshed Project (AFP) provides a theoretical and practical backdrop
Learning Objectives

• Define, analyze, & articulate theories, practices, & discourses pertaining to food systems.

• Define & critique conceptual & programmatic definitions of & approaches to enhancing food security locally, regionally, & internationally.

• Define & critique scholar/practitioner participation as change agents in the food system

• Incorporate food security concepts & strategies into personal & professional practice for socially just ends.
Focused on the concepts of:

- Food security & hunger
- Community food security
- Food sovereignty
- Resiliency
- Agricultural sustainability (local, regional, & international)

Topics included but were not limited to:

- Food security definitions & policy
- Agroecology & sustainability
- Farm to School movement
- Community food assessments & “Whole Measures”
- Food justice
- Neoliberalism & globalization
- Critical strategies & approaches for social change
 Assignments

• Weekly Critical Reflection Papers (25%)

• Student-led Facilitation (20%) (self-assessment)

• Practitioner Narrative Assignment (30%)

• Participation Self-Assessment (25%)
**Practitioner Narrative Assignment**

- **Narrative Inquiry** (Connelly & Clandinin, 2005; Peters et al., 2004; Richmond, 2002)
  - Narratives as generative spaces of “process and product”
  - Semi-structured interviews; 90-120 minutes
  - Transcribed, edited, and analyzed using course concepts & literature
  - Vetted for public use
  - 12 narratives across 3 states

- **“Critical Practitioner”** (Wilson & Hayes, 2000; Brookfield, 2000)
  - Engendering critical reflection through storytelling
Practitioner Narrative Assignment

Integrative process of story telling and making:

- Begin with past experiences as practitioners working on community food security & food system issues
- Focus on current instance of practice: “practice story”
- Conclude with reflections-on-practice & future intentions for addressing food security in the community
Salient Themes from Narratives

- Diverse illustrations of strategies across a number of programmatic areas
  - Food hubs
  - Food councils
  - Community & school gardens
  - Farmer’s markets
  - SNAP/WIC

- Various “takes” on community food security
  - Food access (e.g., individual health focused)
  - Increase availability of food (e.g., farmer focused)
  - Local food (e.g., enhance local economy and community)
  - Tensions with emergency food system (e.g., root causes vs charity)
  - Political considerations (e.g., justice and fairness)
Salient Themes from Narratives

Drawing upon social movement theory, illustrated how the stories were strategic orientations for change activities (Stevenson, Ruhf, Lezberg, & Clancy, 2007)

- **Warrior work**: focuses on contesting inequitable, dominant structures (*the work of resistance*)

- **Builder work**: the creation of new initiatives, models, & programmatic possibilities (*the work of reconstruction*)

- **Weaver work**: develops strategic & conceptual linkages between “warrior” & “builder” work (*the work of connection*)
Student Reflections: Narratives as Sites of Learning

- Provided first-hand exposure to community food work
- Enabled opportunities for community engagement
- Culmination of all themes and discourses had read about over the semester
- New research approach for future application
- “Critical practitioner” thinking

1 Solicited student comments
2 IRB Course Evaluations (Virginia Tech IRB NUMBER: 10-1003)
“The narrative assignment has been the most useful component of the course. I enjoyed having a larger assignment to dig my teeth into, and getting a real life experience, first hand.”

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Why use Narratives?

When facing a complex problem like community food insecurity, “seeing” the system “better” means reading a multiplicity of realities and generating new ways to engage them…

- **Student**: Fosters critical reflection through story making

- **Practitioner**: Stories inform and weave together the work in the Central Appalachian region

- **Community**: Stories humanize the “wicked problems” of food security and create new possibilities for social change
Diana Manee- Youth Empowered Solutions

Diana Manee works for Youth Empowered Solutions in Asheville, NC. She guides groups of employed youth in various community-based projects they decide on. Recently they have been working to integrate healthy food into a corner store within walking distance to several public housing communities that do not have easy access to a grocery store, in a community where there is no grocery store and within walking distance to several public housing communities. She holds corner storeowners in high regards for the struggles it actually takes to run a viable business, and recognizes the challenges of transitioning to incorporate healthy food. Diana sees policy work as the driving force for food system change. She believes in the boundless potential of youth in affecting their communities.

To read Diana's full profile click here.

Want to learn more about Youth Empowered Solutions? Visit their website.
Questions

Do people feel food security in terms of...?

Do the government delays in implementing policies exist established?

Do you inspire someone to speak up?

Does a good policy look like...?

How plan to implement those policies. Any going to ensure policy measures are followed through.

How improve food system to alleviate hunger?

Are current food policies actually HELP PEOPLE
References


Thank you

www.appalachianfoodshedproject.org

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