

Integrating Experience into (Inter)disciplinarity: A Reading Group Experiment

Ann Chrapkiewicz

IIT Fellow

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IIT: Two-year path

Project History

- 2011-2012
 - Full-length course syllabus design
 - Poster
- 2012-13
 - Condensation of course syllabus into 6-week reading group plan
 - Implementation of reading group
 - Reflections

Intellectual Trajectory

- 2011-12
 - JMC Course observations, explorations of definitions
 - Interest in ID theory
- 2012 Summer
 - Attended MSU CITL, May
 - AIS article; interactions with experts on ID
- 2012-13
 - Integrative learning, focus on student-experience-as-knowledge

Physiology

of

Interdisciplinary

Course

Design

Dimensions of Interdisciplinarity

Isolated relationship to disciplines

- Types of interdisciplinarity: methods of interaction among disciplinary perspectives (Luttwak)
- Visibility of disciplines—to what extent should these be made explicit to students?
- Using multiple disciplines to address an issue or solve a problem (Olson)
- Balance of disciplinary dominance

Goals for learning processes and skills

- Taxonomies (Bloom) Knowledge → Evaluation
- Orders of cognitive skills (Perry) Dualism → Commitment within Relativism
- Solving of complex problems or gaining of complex understanding (which single disciplines can't address)
- "Meta awareness" of various epistemologies, spontaneous ability to integrate knowledges

"Food, Health, and the Body: Experience and Politics"

The beginning section of the course will help the students establish and share their individual interests and positions as a basis for integrating experience and self-reflective thought throughout the remainder of the course.

Part I: Framing Questions—Experience and Politics

Week 1: Introduction: Positions and Connections

- Day 1 In class: Image Response Activity
View in class: "You Are What You Eat?" UP w/Chris Hayes, MSNBC Broadcast, April 7, 2011. <http://video.msnbc.msn.com/up-with-chris-hayes/4609830302460983030>
- Day 2 Read, post, to Angel, and comment on recent NYT or WSJ article of your choosing before class.
Angel: Wendell Berry, "The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture," Sierra Club Books, 1977—"The Unsettling of America" (Chapter 1, pp. 3-16)

Week 2: Positions and Connections, continued

- Day 1 Due: Assignment #1—"Image Collection and Reflection"
- Day 2 Angel: read other students' posts of media articles.

Course Development in IIT Fellowship Program

MC/ANP 300-Level Course

Course Goals: We will use readings, collaborative discussion, class activities, and assignments to examine practices, beliefs, and attitudes about food and bodies in local, U.S., cross-cultural, and personal contexts. As the course progresses, students should develop the ability to:

- Respond to and analyze symbols, images, and messages related to food, health, and the body—in media and discourse of various forms
- Evaluate the ways in which dominant models of eating, health, and the body in the U.S. are specific, historically produced, and politically influenced.
- Situate your own practices, experiences, and beliefs within the context of the dominant models to which you have been exposed, and in comparison with cross-cultural examples
- See the ways in which values and practices of biomedicine, capitalism, agriculture, media industries, and scientific expertise converge and interact with daily, "individual" choices and actions related to the body.
- Posit creative connections among experience, academic knowledge, and symbols/imagery.

Problem

NEEDED:

- Clarity on these dimensions
- Alignment with course design

Focus: Physiology

Course/Syllabus

Design

Instructor's Learning Goals

Scholarship on I.D.

Defining the Course's Agenda

Which dimension is the primary goal, or the motivator of the course?

Interdisciplinary Inquiry as a subset of Integrative Learning Goals

Dimensions of

Interdisciplinarity

Idealized relationship to disciplines

Types of
interdisciplinarity;
methods of interaction
among disciplinary
perspectives (Lattuca)

Visibility of
disciplines—to what
extent should these be
made explicit to
students?

Using multiple
disciplines to address
an issue or solve a
problem (Klein)

Balance of disciplinary
dominance

Goals for learning processes and skills

Taxonomies (Bloom)
Knowledge -->
Evaluation

Orders of cognitive
skills (Perry):
Dualism -->
Commitment within
Relativism

Solving of complex
problems or gaining of
complex understanding
(which single disciplines
can't address)

"Meta-awareness" of
various epistemologies,
spontaneous ability to
integrate knowledges

Course Syllabus excerpt

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Transition

Semester-Long Course Syllabus to
Six-week Reading Group

Independent Study Spring 2013 — open to all students

MC 399 (1 credit) or non-credit reading group

Politics, Media, Experience: Health and the Body in Context



How do understandings of 'health' acquire social and political power, influencing such things as: health insurance debates, national health care policy, obsession with the calorie, and whether or not you drank cow's milk this morning. What are the implicit definitions and meanings of 'health' that circulate in national and state policy, the media, science textbooks, and in conversations with our peers?

When—and how—do our beliefs and attitudes about food and the body intersect or conflict with those that appear in policies pertaining to nutrition, public assistance, agriculture, health insurance, and other issues?

Using media items chosen by each participant, we will **integrate our own perspectives and experiences** as important sources of knowledge, as sites of analysis, and as examples of the larger patterns we are studying through various academic disciplines. Why do we hold the beliefs that we hold about health and the body? What are our daily practices surrounding food and the body, and how have we come to have those practices?

This eight-week reading group can be taken for one credit or not-for credit. Weekly meetings will be discussion-focused and will integrate analysis of student-chosen media items with short readings (less than 40 pages per week).

MC 399 (or non-credit)

Spring 2013

Thursdays, 5:30-6:30 p.m.

January 24 – February 28

Case Hall, Room TBA

The reading group will be led by JMC Professor Constance Hunt (huntc@msu.edu) and Anthropology graduate student Ann Chrapkiewicz (annrenee@msu.edu).

To enroll, please email Professor Constance Hunt (huntc@msu.edu). Include: 1) full name, 2) PID, 3) whether you would like to sign for credit or not-for-credit, 4) your major and class level.



Reading Group, Spring 2013

- Weekly, 1-hour meetings, January 24 – February 28
- Student-submitted images, readings, student-experience
- 12 students from all class levels and several majors signed up; 8 continued through March 21
- Supervised and mentored by Professor Constance Hunt
- Weekly Themes:
 - Food production, labor, farms, economics of food
 - Morality, gender, sexuality, ethnicity
 - Consumption, excess, hunger, poverty
 - Responsibility, the state, policy, authority
 - Body image, advertising, consumption/eating, sex, gender

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways were you able to connect the class images (i.e. those shown by the instructor, those submitted by you and the other students) to the themes from the course? If applicable, please describe how you made connections among those images to 1) themes discussed in the reading group, and 2) broader themes from other courses or experiences.
2. How has your understanding of 1) personal history or experiential knowledge, and 2) the importance of analyzing images, changed since the beginning of the reading group?
For example, since the reading group began, do you see a change in how personal experience or image analysis might be important sources of knowledge, or as things which might influence policy in some way? Please describe if possible.
3. How did your learning experiences in (and in preparation for) the reading group connect with, contrast with, enrich, or challenge your 1) other coursework at Madison, 2) MSU as a whole, and/or 3) other sites of education?

Student Responses to Reading Group: Summary

- Increased ability to connect images, meanings, and academic themes
- Little explicit reflection on the role of experience as a source of knowledge
- Subject matter
 - novel and appreciated within JMC context
 - relevant to policy and other coursework

Student Responses to Reading Group: Examples (Images)

“Although the images did not always explicitly reveal a connection to the themes, they provided an opportunity to examine them and find connections. I think the more implicit connections were the most valuable because they challenged us to realize how certain images convey multiple messages, regardless of whether we are initially aware, or not.”

“After doing the reading, all of the ideas presented there were fresh in my mind, and I was often looking for them in the images, although those connections most likely wouldn't have occurred to me before the reading. As the course moved on, it was easier to see relationships between current and past images, since there was a lot of overlap, especially with issues of gender, race, and class.”

Student Responses to Reading Group: Examples (Experience)

“I never thought of bodily knowledge as a form of knowledge before. I think we are constantly taught to ignore what our body is telling us, and although I was occasionally told that I should "listen" to my body, I didn't think of it as a form of knowledge that should have precedence over other knowledge.”

“I learned that my experiential knowledge was deeply rooted in nutrition, and that not everyone from the class has as much understanding as I would have liked. I learned that students have their own backgrounds in various areas and that the beauty of class discussion comes from multiple view points and opinions.”

“I also benefitted personally from the course...learning to understand my body's interaction with the food I eat. For example, I realized to my great dismay that I am probably developing lactose intolerance and never would have made that connection otherwise.”

Student Responses to Reading Group: Examples (Subject Matter)

“The gender readings challenged and provoked my thoughts of socially constructed ideas of gender roles and engendered me to think much more critically about the role that gender plays in health policies.”

“I would have never sought out many of the articles/excerpts we read and I feel they are a necessary participant in the conversations had at all levels, policy, academic, and others.”

“Since I'm also a science major, it was really eye-opening to read the articles about how science is biased, since it's something I generally think of as straight-forward.”

Looking Ahead

Demonstrated an ability to integrate into James Madison curricular context

Students' connections among images, experience, theory, and policy can improve robustness of coursework and curricular learning outcomes

Questions or Comments?
