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ARTICLE

Teaching and Learning Participatory Methods in Anthropology: Recognizing and Overcoming Significant Obstacles

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Abstract

Participatory methods in cultural anthropology continue to gain popularity. These methods respect community values and promote empowerment and co-creation, enhancing the ethicality and relevance of research findings. Despite their advantages, formal training in participatory methods is limited in anthropology programs, often leaving anthropologists to learn through trial and error with community partners. This article provides an overview of commonly used participatory methods and examines the state of training in these methods using survey and focus group data from PhD students and faculty from the United States. We analyze student and instructor experiences and challenges teaching and learning these methods. The paper concludes with recommendations for improving curricula and training to better equip anthropologists for collaborative research.

Keywords: Participatory methods; Cultural anthropology; Community-based research; Student training; Applied anthropology; Curriculum development

Introduction

In cultural anthropology, participatory methods are increasingly popular. These methods can involve research participants in study design, data collection and analysis,

and reporting. Advantages of these methods include respect of communities, sensitivity to cultural values, and principles of empowerment and co-creation. Beyond advancing ethical research practices, participatory methods can also enhance the relevance and applicability of research findings.

However, few anthropology departments offer formal training and courses in participatory research methods (Jessee et al. 2015; Ruth et al. 2022a, 2022b). Anthropologists who adopt this methodological approach typically teach themselves and learn by trial and error through projects with community partners. Improving training in participatory research methods would better equip anthropologists for research in collaboration with community partners, advancing both applied and academic anthropology.

We present an overview of participatory methods that are commonly used by anthropologists on community-based participatory research teams and present the state of research on teaching these methods in anthropology. Using data from surveys of PhD students and focus groups with PhD student fellows and faculty in the National Science Foundation's Cultural Anthropology Methods Program, we analyze student and faculty familiarity with participatory methods and their experiences of training in these methodologies. We conclude with recommendations to address student and faculty concerns and to develop sustainable curricula and training in participatory research.

Participatory Methods in Anthropology, Past and Present

Participatory methods have important foundations in anthropology. In 1948, Sol Tax, at the University of Chicago, started a field school with the Meskwaki Nation in Tama, Iowa, for training anthropology graduate students in research methods. Tax's project ran for 11 years with the goal of bringing research participants into all projects as real partners at every level of the process, identifying the practical problems that needed attention and defining and implementing solutions for those problems. Tax called the concept "action anthropology" (Rubinstein 1986; Tax 1958, 1975), and it strongly influenced the development of applied anthropology (van Willigen 2002). Tax's approach, and others like it, came to be known as the "Northern tradition" in participatory research, which emphasizes practical goals, use-inspired research, and systemic reforms (Wallerstein and Duran 2017).

Another influential approach to participatory anthropology is often tied to Brazilian scholar Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Freire's radical approach to education empowered historically marginalized people to pursue social change through grassroots work (Rahman 2008) and has been taken up by anthropologists doing participatory action research, "troublemaking" activist anthropology, and teaching that inspires students (McKenna 2013). Freire's approach in Latin America, and others originating in Asia and Africa (Brown and Tandon 1983; Hall et al. 1982), came to be known as the "Southern tradition" in participatory research, which emphasizes liberation,

emancipation, decolonization, and revolutionary action (Brown and Tandon 1983; Wallerstein and Duran 2017).

Aside from these two influential participatory traditions, a participatory approach has long been pursued by some anthropologists working to address issues of colonization and racism, often at the margins of the discipline (Allen and Jobson 2016). Early examples include Haitian anthropologist Anténor Firmin (Firmin 1885; Firmin with Fluehr-Lobban 2002) and African American scholar W.E.B. DuBois (2003 [1906]). Contemporary anthropologists and other scholars continue this work, developing critical, decolonizing, Indigenous, and Black feminist approaches (Abu-Lughod 2015; Bolles 2001; Brayboy et al. 2012; Collins 1993; Crenshaw 2013; Harrison 1991; hooks 1994; Smith 2021). As participatory approaches, these traditions share the goal of centering historically marginalized people and perspectives in the research process.

Participatory Methods in Anthropology Today

Today, participatory approaches are popular and widely accepted. Table 1 displays the variety of approaches to participatory research that have developed in the last 30 years, and Table 2 lays out specific participatory methods that are of current interest in anthropology. Action-oriented and participatory-centered research share core tenets. Community-engaged research (Hardy 2023; Ross et al. 2010; Sandler 2007), community-based participatory research (CBPR) (Duke 2020; Dunkel 2017; Wallerstein and Duran 2010), and participatory action research (PAR) similarly emphasize community participation in the research process, addressing community-identified problems. Flexibility—in the many participatory roles undertaken by community partners (Altrichter et al. 2002)—allows researchers to adapt to local needs, expectations, and community-identified problems.

Table 1. Approaches to Participatory Research

Methodological framework	Definition	Key texts
Citizen Science	Citizen Science seeks to involve communities in various research stages, from study design and data collection to data analysis and dissemination of results. Projects aim to use and extend community expertise, often providing technical training to participants.	Agostini et al. 2019; Kimura and Kinchy 2019; Sandler 2019, 2022; Sturtzsreetharan 2020; Vohland et al. 2021
Community-based participatory research (CBPR)	CBPR is a research approach in collaboration with community members and research participants. Often, community members and research participants take part in the	Castleden and Gavin 2008; Duke 2020; Gravlee et al. 2015; Horowitz et al. 2009;

	research process, such as defining research questions and consulting and advising researchers on social and cultural dynamics in the community studied.	Israel 2012; Wallerstein and Duran 2010; Yan et al. 2024
Community Engaged Research (CEnR)	CEnR centers practices around relationality, attempts to reduce power differentials between researcher and the community studied, and prioritizes active community involvement and decision-making throughout the research process. CEnR is typically iterative (ongoing/ open-ended/ flexible time frame) and centers partnerships, reciprocity, trust building, and mutual benefit. Results may be used in community learning, direct community action, issue-driven advocacy, or efforts around policy and social oriented change.	Austin 2004; Hardy 2023; Kue et al. 2016; Luger et al. 2020; Luque and Tyson 2023; Mikesell et al. 2013; Ross et al. 2010; Sandler 2007; Wallerstein et al. 2020
Decolonizing Methodologies	Decolonizing methodologies center non-Western ways of knowing, discovering, and knowledge production by understanding and engaging critically in dynamics of interconnectedness and unequal power, and by challenging dominant methods and Western paradigms.	Abu-Lughod 2015; Allen and Jobson 2016; Harrison 1991; Marsters and Hardin 2024; Smith 2021
Feminist Methodologies	Feminist methodologies aim to rectify biases, perpetuated harms, and knowledge gaps in research, using multidisciplinary approaches (including participatory research). Feminist methodologies illuminate the intersecting roles of gender, age, class, race, and sexuality.	Davis and Craven 2023; Enslin 1994; Nast 1994; Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002
Indigenous Methodologies (Critical Indigenous Research Methodologies - CIRM)	Indigenous Methodologies seek to address legacies of colonialism by empowering Indigenous ways of knowing and self-determination, including the right to refuse research. CIRM is led by Indigenous people and may involve working with non-Indigenous collaborators.	Atalay 2012, 2020; Brayboy et al. 2012; Denzin 2008; Jiménez 2021; Nxumalo and Cedillo 2017; Phillips 2013; Smith 2021; Starr et al. 2011; Tuck

		and Yang 2014; Wilder Foundation 2019
Participatory Action Research (PAR) + Action Research + Action Anthropology	PAR aims to promote change for problems defined by participants using an iterative process that includes participants in the research topic/questions, planning, data collections, data analysis, and producing and having ownership over research products.	Altrichter et al. 2002; Baum et al. 2006; Bergold and Thomas 2012; Brown et al. 2008; Brydon-Miller et al. 2003; Collins 2004; Cammarota and Fine 2010; Fals-Borda 1987; Greenwood et al. 1993; Hemment 2007; Lamphere 2003, 2004; Lane et al. 2011, 2023; Phillips 2013; Rubinstein 1986; Tax 1958, 1975; Whyte et al. 1989
Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) or Rapid Ethnographic Assessment (REA)	PRA or REA is a model for problem-oriented rapid research that involves members of the group or community in the research process to inform policy or practice.	Chambers 1994; Handwerker 2001; Sangaramoorthy and Kroeger 2020
Participatory Visual & Digital Methods (PVDM)	PVDM uses the collaborative production of visual or digital media such as video and photography as a means of carrying out research with participants and communicating research to a broader audience.	Gubrium and Harper 2013; Lorenz and Kolb 2009; Packard 2008; Pauwels 2015
Research-based Service Learning	Research-based service learning is an approach to teaching and research in which students learn through volunteering and carrying out research on topics defined by community partner organizations.	Copeland et al. 2016; Copeland and Dengah 2016; Gravlee et al. 2015; Kelemen and Balázs 2008; Mould 2014; Parker et al. 2018

Table 2: Participatory Research Methods Current in Anthropology and Related Fields

Specific Methods	Definition	Key texts
Community-based Participant Observation (CBPO)	CBPO is a method for ethnographic research that combines participant observation with community-based participatory research to facilitate knowledge co-production by engaging community partners or residents across ethnographic data collection and reporting.	Roque et al. 2024
Digital Storytelling (DTS)	DTS is a community engaged research method using digital and visual participatory approaches used in a range of settings and contexts with six to ten participants with an emphasis on counter-narratives and challenging stereotypes.	Alexandra 2015; Fiddian-Green et al. 2023; Gubrium and Harper 2013; Lambert 2013; Tang 2020
Participatory Mapping and GIS	Community members create a spatial representation of significant places and landmarks. Participatory mapping may use transect walks, sketch maps, annotation of existing maps, or geographic information systems (GIS).	Fagerholm et al. 2021; Gubrium and Harper 2013; Corbett 2009
Participatory Modeling	Facilitators lead stakeholders in collaboratively developing a model of a system, typically using simplified techniques drawn from cognitive, agent-based, system dynamics, or geospatial modeling.	Gray et al. 2018; Jacquinod and Bonaccorsi 2019; Zellner 2012; Quimby and Beresford 2023
Photovoice	Photovoice is a community-based participatory research method combining visual elicitation, focus group discussions and interviewing with an emphasis on addressing community problems, assets, and concerns by engaging participants in collaborating and sharing stories.	Harper 2009; Harper and Howard 2024; Radonic et al. 2023; Pasco et al. 2024; Wang 1999

Sister Girl Talk (SGT)	SGT is an interviewing method intended to provide space for small groups (four to six) of Black women to express thoughts and feelings through conversation, meeting, and engaging in critical care conversation. The method is less extractive and more focused on empathy and healing wounds from stereotypes.	Mitchell et al. 2022; Mitchell 2024
Storywork, Story Circles, or Talking Circles	Stories are shared with equal power and turn-taking (no requirement that one shares) with an emphasis on Indigenous knowledge practices and a holistic approach. "... originated among Indigenous peoples of the Midwest United States as a form of shared governance and a tool of learning" (Scott Figueroa 2024,140) and has been used outside of these communities for healing, problem-solving, and decision-making.	Archibald 2008; Atleo 2010; Brown and Di Lallo 2020; Hardy 2022; Parks 2023; Scott Figueroa 2024
Sustainable Future Scenarios (SFS)	SFS involves community members in defining a range of plausible narratives about socio-technical futures and then evaluating scenarios to inform policy and decision-making.	Iwaniec et al. 2020; Larson et al. 2015; Neuhoﬀ et al. 2023; Richter et al. 2023; Roque et al. 2022
Talanoa	Talanoa research methodology (TRM) originated among Pacific Indigenous communities as "open, informal conversations between people in which they share their stories, thoughts, and feelings" (Marsters and Hardin 2024,136) with an emphasis on connecting, reflexivity, reciprocity, social status and positionality, and empathy. This method is not linear and does not necessarily result in a final decision (Marsters and Hardin 2024).	Marsters and Hardin 2024; Vaioleti 2006

For example, participatory action research (PAR) is among the most common research approaches in anthropology; it is also used by diverse academic disciplines and international and non-governmental organizations (Hemment 2007). PAR researchers provide participants with tools to define their problems and identify goals to rectify them (Cammarota and Fine 2010). Using an iterative process, PAR includes community members

and stakeholders in research topic planning, data collection, data analysis, and producing and having ownership over research products (Hemment 2007; Watson 2019). Collaborations using PAR typically aim to promote social change, policy change, social justice, and change for problems defined by participants.

Participatory research can be difficult, time-consuming, and ethically complex. For example, community-based participatory research can perpetuate problems that researchers intended to correct and even lead to new problems (Günel and Watanabe 2024; Phillips 2013). The misuse or co-optation of participation can perpetuate inequities among vulnerable communities. Participation can be hard to define and enact within asymmetrical distributions of power, authority, and labor (Phillips 2013). One way of addressing these challenges is to ensure that the distribution and compensation of labor is assessed by people participating in local projects—not just by stakeholders in positions of power.

Learning & Teaching Participatory Research

While participatory methods have a long-standing history in anthropology and are increasingly embraced, there remain some significant problems for anthropologists teaching and learning participatory research. There are few formal training and educational spaces available in anthropology for learning and teaching participatory methodologies and interlinked challenges, like how to navigate personal experiences, intersectional identities and responsibilities, and inequitable research design and practice (Günel and Watanabe 2024). As a result, anthropologists often struggle to understand how to place their participatory research in wider calls for meaningful decolonizing shifts in (critical) pedagogy, knowledge production, and participatory research (Günel and Watanabe 2024; Parker et al. 2018).

Beyond this, the logistics of teaching participatory methods in anthropology classrooms are formidable. Action research is fundamentally relational and non-linear, making it challenging to standardize classes and programs that require formal processes and structures (Watson 2019). Course loads typically do not account for the invisible labor (e.g., logistics and planning meetings and facilitating decision-making among stakeholders) required of instructors of participatory methods, above and beyond the labor of teaching and evaluating students (Watson 2019). University requirements for individual evaluation, strict timelines for semesters and graduation, and in-classroom time often conflict with the team-based and in-the-community aspects of learning participatory methods. In these ways, university culture and institutional structures can limit opportunities for student training in participatory research (Kelemen and Balázs 2008; Parker et al. 2018; Watson 2019).

Despite the various challenges outlined here, some have found solutions and approaches to teaching participatory methods. Recent published approaches to teaching participatory methodologies and methods include a variety of pedagogical practices and

method training activities (Parker et al. 2018). In her book *Community Engagement Through Collaborative Writing: Storytelling Together* (2023), for example, anthropologist Lisa Jane Hardy unpacked the theories, methods, and practices of community-engaged research. Each chapter provides activities (e.g., applying principles matrixes, free writes, and decision trees), concept mapping, and stories from her classrooms and research projects. The following key principles are core to participatory research: challenging power; trust; tangible reciprocity; multiple knowledges; iterative cycles of learning and improvement; transparency; organic role shifting; connection; discomfort/bravery; learning and growing as a primary goal; and the researcher's principles (Hardy 2023).

Graduate programs, field schools, and certificates can support teaching and mentoring anthropology students in participatory and action research skills, project design, and community collaboration. Examples include certificate programs like UNC-Chapel Hill's graduate certificate in Participatory Research (Parker et al. 2018); field schools like The Health Equity Alliance of Tallahassee (HEAT) Ethnographic Field School (EFS) in Florida (Gravlee et al. 2015); courses like AGSC 465R Health, Poverty, Agriculture at Montana State University (Dunkel 2017) and those offered at Mississippi State University and Utah State University (Copeland and Dengah 2016); a participatory action Nipivut project (Watson 2019); and anthropologist-led collaborative studies such as those funded under the U.S. National Science Foundation's Growing Convergence Research program (Castro-Diaz et al. 2025; Roque et al. 2022). Programs, field schools, and classes for undergraduate and graduate students accomplish student learning objectives by offering various combinations of multimodal modules with directed readings (Dunkel 2017); reflective writing, journaling, and structure prompts for reflective discussion (Copeland and Dengah 2016; Dunkel 2017; Gravlee et al. 2015; Hardy 2023; Kelemen and Balazs 2008; Parker et al. 2018; Ruth et al. 2022a); small and whole group discussions (Dunkel 2017); role-play (Dunkel 2017; Ruth et al. 2022a); curriculum dedicated to the entire research design and process (Radonic et al. 2023); a class case study, team-based research, and field trips with community members (Dunkel 2017; Kelemen and Balazs 2008; Parker et al. 2018; Ruth et al. 2022a; Spencer and Molina 2018; Watson 2019); community practitioner and faculty co-teaching models (Orellana and Chaitanya 2020); and inclusivity of diverse voices, cultures, and knowledges (Dunkel 2017; Hardy 2023; Parker et al. 2018; Ruth et al. 2022a).

There isn't a one-size-fits-all design, or cookbook model, for experiential training in participatory and action research (Copeland and Dengeh 2016; Watson 2019). However, in the reviewed publications, teamwork and reflection, and experiential and hands-on learning are themes that cut across various departments and projects. Teamwork and reflection take similar forms across the programs reviewed: students work in groups with each other and with communities outside of the university (including community programs, businesses, and other schools) (Copeland and Dengah 2016). Kelemen and Balázs (2008) account for their graduate class where they taught students participatory action research methods. Participating students completed classwork activities and gave feedback at the end of the course. The authors reflect on their first course findings and found that

participatory action research classwork activities and fieldwork need balance; there is a range with how much flexibility and freedom students should have during fieldwork; and participatory courses should be adapted to university culture and local contexts (Kelemen and Balázs 2008).

Given the current landscape of participatory research teaching and learning, we conclude that there are significant challenges, but these have been overcome with well-documented teaching strategies in specific local programs and contexts. However, less is known about the capacity for teaching participatory methods to PhD students in anthropology programs across institutions. In the rest of this paper, we use a national sample of PhD students and methods teachers to assess (1) PhD student motivations to learn participatory methods; (2) the broad availability of courses for PhD students to learn participatory methods; (3) existing preparation and support for PhD students motivated to learn participatory methods; and (4) expert methods teachers' perspectives on teaching participatory methods for PhD students in anthropology.

Study Background & Setting

The National Science Foundation (NSF) Cultural Anthropology Methods Program (CAMP) is an intensive summer program that delivers advanced training in research design, data collection and analysis methods, and proposal writing. Over three summers (2021, 2022, and 2023), 60 competitively selected PhD student fellows and 30 faculty experts from different institutions across the U.S. participated in the program. The goals of CAMP are to train fellows on the less-taught anthropological methods (including participatory methods), help them design fundable dissertation research, and teach them to train the next generation in methods. Fellows receive in-person lectures, pre-recorded lectures, hands-on activities to apply methods, one-on-one mentorship, and group mentorship on project proposals.

Recruitment for the program included an initial email announcement sent in 2021 to all members of the American Anthropological Association (21,344 individuals), which invited them to sign up for a community of practice (CoP) listserv. Subsequent program recruitment (in 2022 and 2023) included an email announcement to the CoP members, an open call posted on the methods4all.org website, and announcements to relevant academic listservs and social media. Students enrolled in institutions across the United States are invited to apply using an online application. The application asks them to tell us about their interests in learning methods and their prior methods training. We also ask them to describe their research project and career goals. After they have provided the information, we ask them to consent to their de-identified application answers being used for research purposes. The 20 students in each cohort were selected by four faculty evaluators based on: (1) the extent to which the student's project contributes to the academic discipline and to the student's academic trajectory, (2) the clarity of the student's research question or problem, and (3) the demonstrated need for the instruction on

research methods provided through CAMP. Consideration was given to achieving balance across geographic regions and student demographics. When multiple highly ranked applicants were affiliated with the same doctoral program, no more than two were admitted, with the remaining applicants placed on a waitlist. U.S. citizenship was not a requirement, but eligibility was limited to students enrolled at U.S. universities.

Students selected for the program and faculty participants were asked to consent to research activities connected to the program, including focus groups. This study was approved by Arizona State University's IRB (STUDY00012825).

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected using (1) open-ended questions in the student applications; and (2) focus groups conducted with student fellows (a) and faculty (b).

1. Student Applications: Over the three years we collected data from 316 student applicants who consented to our using their responses for this research (Year 1, n = 209; Year 2, n = 63; Year 3, n = 44). Demographic characteristics include earned master's degree or more (n=261) and earned bachelor's (n=55); gender includes women (n=203), men (n=72), and non-binary/other (n=41); racial/ethnic identity consists of white (n= 145), Asian (n=66), Hispanic/Latine (n=52), Black (n=34), Native American (n=2), two or more races (n=4), and preferred not to answer (n=13). The application questions used for this analysis include: (1) What are you excited about learning in the methods program? And (2) Please describe the method(s) courses or trainings you have taken, either in your graduate program(s) or outside of them (e.g., workshops/trainings).
- 2a. Student Fellow Focus Groups: We conducted two focus groups with nine students who completed the methods program in Year 3. Participants included women (n=5) and men or non-binary individuals (n=4) who were non-white (n=6) and white (n=3). We asked fellows about any formal or informal training they had in research methods, their prior experiences, if any, with participatory methods, and how they have been encouraged or discouraged to use participatory methods in their dissertation research.
- 2b. Faculty Focus Groups: We conducted five focus groups with 14 faculty experts who taught in Years 1–3. Participants included women (n=12) and men (n=2) who were white (n=8) and non-white (n=6). We asked CAMP faculty how they had learned participatory methods, how they use those methods, and how they advise students about them.

Data Analysis

We analyzed our data using word-based analysis with the open-ended application responses, as this method is appropriate for large, thin text datasets, and theme analysis with the focus group data, as this method is appropriate for detail-rich, nuanced qualitative datasets (Bernard et al. 2016; Beresford and Bernard 2023; du Bray 2023; Ryan and Bernard 2003).

1. Word-based Analysis of Student Application Data: The text responses from the application questions were imported into MAXQDA software. Each question was first structurally coded by question, then using the MAXdictio function, we conducted a word-based analysis and applied a standard stop-list plus added words such as “excited,” “learn,” “how,” “interest,” and “work” to the list. Single-word frequencies are displayed in Table 3 and Table 4 to identify the most salient words for each question. Then, using the Word-Combinations and the Key-Words-in-Context (KWIC) functions, we could see the context surrounding the salient words (Bernard 2016; Bernard et al. 2016; Ryan and Bernard 2003).
2. Theme Analysis of Focus Group Data: Focus groups were conducted online and transcripts were uploaded into MAXQDA. They were first structurally coded by the questions asked during the focus groups outlined above. Those segments for each question were then reviewed iteratively to identify repeating themes and ideas (Bernard et al. 2016; Ryan and Bernard 2003).

Findings

High PhD Student Motivation to Learn Participatory Methods

In applications, students indicated what they were excited to learn in the methods program. The single-word frequencies in Table 3 show that participatory methods-related words—participatory, decolonize(ing), community, and Indigenous—are ranked in the top five. A third of the applicants (33%) used the word participatory to express their enthusiasm for learning. The KWIC analysis allowed us to see the context in which students are using these terms.

Students used the word *participatory* in connection with methods, methodology, and research most often. The use of participatory is also used in connection with decolonizing and Indigenous methods. For example, one student stated, “I am most excited about the decolonizing, Indigenous, and participatory methods training that is offered by CAMP.” As this quote demonstrates, the term *decolonize(ing)* is often paired with Indigenous, but not always. For example, one student wrote, “I am extremely interested in learning methodological skills aimed at designing decolonizing projects in which local communities, commonly regarded as research subjects, are incorporated as true collaborators in the process of knowledge production, and stakeholders and stewards of archaeological

resources.” The word *Indigenous* was used with the following words: methods, groups, communities, peoples, and perspectives. For instance, “I am excited to learn more about decolonizing, Indigenous, and participatory methods, as well as develop my proposal writing skills.”

The term *community* was widely used in conjunction with words such as based, centered, centric, engaged, and members. One student wrote, “I am excited to learn participatory methods such as community-based participatory research and participatory visual and digital methods.” It was also used sporadically in terms of building community with other scholars and building a community of practice, which is distinctly different from community-centered methods. Overall, when using the term community, students connected it with participatory methods.

The individual word frequencies of four of the top five most frequent words, as well as the KWIC analysis, support the call for anthropology training programs to increase the formal training of students in participatory methods that incorporate communities as collaborators (Negrón et al. 2024; Ruth et al. 2022b).

Table 3. Word-based frequencies for single words for the methods graduate students are excited to learn

Excited to Learn				
Word Frequencies	Word Rank	Word Frequency	Unique Responses out of 316	% of Unique Responses
analysis	1	119	97	30.70
participatory	2	116	103	32.59
decolonize	3	108	102	32.28
community	4	77	65	20.57
Indigenous	5	75	64	20.25
design	6	74	67	21.20
qualitative	7	55	53	16.77
methodology	8	43	39	12.34
ethical	9	36	33	10.44
ethnography	9	36	33	10.44
ecological	11	32	32	10.13
collaborative	12	30	29	9.18
relational	12	30	29	9.18

Low Availability of Courses in Participatory Methods in Anthropology PhD Programs

Data collected from PhD students who applied to the methods program shed light on the methods training they had previously and what methods they wanted to learn. From the single-word frequencies in Table 4, over a quarter of students mentioned having some training in traditional qualitative and ethnographic data collection (including participant observation) and analysis methods (Ruth et al. 2022b). About one-fifth of the students have had “quantitative” and some sort of “design” training. Less than 8% mention having training in any participatory or community-based methods.

Looking at the KWIC, there is a wide range of methods listed. Many students who applied have methods courses available at their institutions, but some have not had any formal methods training within their anthropology program. One student stated, “I have not had the opportunity to take research methods from the anthropology department, but I have taken two Qualitative Research Method courses from the sociology department and one from the educational research department.” Outside traditional ethnographic methods, other methods training taken by students—inside and outside their anthropology programs—include design anthropology, user experience research, interdisciplinary research, observational data collection, discourse analysis, interviews, photography, biomarkers, virtual ethnographic field school, oral history, fieldwork safety, visual methods, and human biology methods. A minority of students have participated in research projects and have been trained in specific areas such as GIS, biostatistics, participatory action research, decolonizing methodologies, and community-based research.

While students mention a range of methods, the most salient are the basics of ethnographic research (see also Ruth et al. 2022b). These data indicate that they have not had training in a broad range of methods across programs, particularly participatory methods. We probed further in focus groups to see how students were engaging in participatory methods within their own programs.

Table 4. Word-based frequencies for single words for methods taken by graduate students applying to methods programs

Methods Taken				
Word Frequencies	Word Rank	Word Frequency	Unique Responses out of 316	% of Unique Responses
qualitative	1	135	118	37.34
analysis	2	129	90	28.48
ethnographic	3	104	89	28.16
design	4	84	68	21.52
quantitative	5	73	66	20.89

ethnography	6	66	54	17.09
interview	7	41	35	11.08
theory	8	38	35	11.08
statistic	9	29	29	9.18
statistical	10	26	25	7.91
survey	10	26	26	8.23
participatory	12	24	23	7.28
community	13	21	18	5.70
ethics	14	20	19	6.01
methodology	14	20	18	5.70
discourse	16	19	18	5.70
observation	16	19	19	6.01
fieldwork	18	18	18	5.70
proposal	18	18	18	5.70
network	20	16	14	4.43
community-based	21	15	14	4.43

Poor Prior Preparation & Strong Support for PhD Students Learning Participatory Methods

Two main themes about students' prior training in participatory methods were found in the student focus group data. First, most students discussed their limited prior knowledge and exposure to participatory methods. They had some theoretical knowledge about decolonization, Black feminist theory, and participatory methods but had not engaged in relevant methods courses nor had formal training available to them. They learned through independent studies, classwork, conference presentations, and readings. One student stated, "A lot of the participatory stuff that I've looked into is just me doing it on my own." However, one student's program focused on environmental justice so their training was directly community-centered and participatory.

Second, students reported that, despite the lack of training, their PhD programs supported participatory methods. Students said their advisors supported their interest in including decolonial and participatory approaches but did not explicitly require them or suggest participatory methods to students. For example, one student commented, "I don't think I've been encouraged to do it [participatory research] explicitly [...] but once my committee started seeing the interest that I had, and the amount of embeddedness I already had, they kind of encouraged it." In focus groups, students lamented the lack of engagement with participatory methods in their programs and discussed the value of the CAMP curriculum to fill this gap.

Faculty Perspectives on Difficulties of Teaching Participatory Methods in Anthropology

In focus groups, we first asked CAMP faculty to discuss how they learned participatory methods and how they teach and train students on participatory methods. Those who received their PhDs prior to 2015 discussed that they had no formal training on participatory methods in their graduate studies and they learned participatory methods by working on projects with others once in their careers. For instance, one professor who received their PhD before 2010 stated, "It was definitely not something that I was trained in. The very first participatory project that I was invited to participate in was when I arrived [at my current institution], and it was already established." They went on to state that they were asked to develop a collaborative project using the infrastructure already in place and learned about participatory research during that project. Those who had received their doctorates after 2015 mentioned having taken classes that discussed participatory research, but only a couple of them were able to work on community-based participatory projects as graduate students. For example, this faculty stated,

I had the opportunity to learn about action research in my first year of undergrad, and that really sparked the interest in how community-university partnerships can look and be more meaningful. But then I didn't have an opportunity to do that type of work [until graduate school when I worked on a] participatory research project with [my advisor] and colleagues ... [on a large grant].

This faculty also mentioned working on a separate Photovoice, grant-funded project with a different professor. This indicates that formal and hands-on training may be increasing for newer generations of scholars.

The majority of the faculty stated they incorporate discussions of participatory research within their methods classes and potentially teach specific methods and collaboration as part of a general methods course, but they heavily relied on advising students to find existing projects to work on or incorporate students into their own participatory projects. The faculty agreed that the best way for students to learn about participatory research was through hands-on experience, but only two of the fourteen focus group faculty had taught a formal participatory research methods class. Each of the two had suggestions of how to make the course manageable given the time constraint of a semester. Each model had students working on research projects; however, one faculty had students working on projects with already established community partners. They stated, "So the entire semester was working on a research project. It was a class of six graduate students, and they had to do a research project from the beginning to end with a community partner that we had established relationships with." The other faculty preferred that everyone work on one project to ensure they could complete the tasks they set out to do. They described their experience:

And so previously, when I taught qualitative research methods, I had students do individual research projects. And by about mid-October half

the class is okay, and the other half hasn't even gotten access to the field site that they planned on [so they won't be able to finish]. So I decided instead to have team projects on one big project.

However, setting up these projects are time-consuming and not necessarily feasible for many faculty, as this more junior faculty explained:

In my department, they have no one who is doing this type of method, which is interesting because they're really excited about it. But sometimes I don't think they acknowledge how much time it takes, and all the underlining parts like getting a partner, and that's why it takes so much time just to prepare it compared to a traditional qualitative methods class.

The responses highlight the challenges in formally teaching participatory research as it often takes more time than one semester will allow and there may not be institutional support for the time commitment needed.

All the CAMP faculty recognized that most current anthropology students are concerned with their positionality and want to conduct ethical data collection with their research communities. We asked them how they advise students interested in conducting participatory methods as part of their dissertation work. Concerns faculty raised regarding advising students on using participatory methods included: ensuring realistic timelines; guiding students through the profound ethical, intellectual, and emotional challenges of doing this work; and developing a research question that makes a theoretical contribution and is simultaneously wanted by the community. One senior faculty, who has extensive participatory research experience, suggested a way to advise current students:

I get a lot of students who want to do [participatory research] for their dissertation. And so for them, the key is coming up with a plan where they can manage expectations, their own expectations of themselves and community partners, expectations of what an "American" grad student can pull out of a hat, you know, which is usually not a lot. They're usually not as resourced as people would think or would hope they would be. And so you encourage them to see participatory research as a spectrum, and to find easy on ramps, and remind them to manage their own and other people's expectations, so that they don't get over-committed, and they can keep their head above water.

Thus, to meet students' goals, the faculty discussed advising students on having only a small portion of their research incorporate participatory methods rather than having their entire project be community-driven. They suggested helping students understand how to do these smaller, bite-size participatory methods by pointing them to concrete resources (see Tables 1 and 2).

Faculty also noted the following strategies for meeting students' concerns toward participatory research: advise students to connect with their communities early on in their

graduate studies to gain an understanding of community concerns; and assess their project's feasibility, develop relationships, and build rapport that will help support the student's project goals for their dissertation and then potential future work within their field site. One faculty stated:

[Participatory research] is slow science, and the academy is not really structured yet for people who are career building. And so, I always tell my students that the best thing to do is to have a multitude of projects going, which is a hard thing to advise. But I think it's important, if this is where they want to go.

Thus, setting expectations that having a fully community-based participatory research project may not be feasible in the short term, but students can incorporate participatory methods on a smaller scale while simultaneously building a strong foundation for long-term community-based research within the field site. In sum, CAMP faculty encouraged students to learn participatory methods through coursework and readings, to gain experience by working on ongoing projects, and to find manageable participatory methods approaches that they can incorporate into their dissertations that align with their research questions and interests while coming up with a long-term strategy for future work.

Discussion: Overcoming Barriers to Teaching Participatory Methods in Anthropology

We identified many barriers to improving training in participatory research methods. First, faculty are reluctant to teach courses on participatory methodologies because many have not had relevant formal training, do not have well-established community research partnerships, do not have the allocated time, or have not considered how to integrate participatory approaches into the methods courses they teach. Second, graduate students might not study participatory research methods because courses are not available, because establishing community partnerships from scratch is time-consuming, or out of fear that it is not appropriate to collaborate closely with the particular group studied. Some graduate students who take a collaborative or participatory research approach report that their work is judged "not anthropological enough" (Logan et al. 2023). Advisors may also discourage graduate students from adopting participatory research methods early in their careers because these methodologies can be more protracted than traditional ethnography. There are also the ongoing concerns of funding for social science programs and research. However, there are resources and advice for addressing many of these challenges.

The wider literature provides another lens for examining challenges in participatory methods teaching. While there is a rich literature on learning and teaching methods for collecting and analyzing social science data, there are fewer resources for teaching participatory research (Hardy 2023; Kelemen and Balázs 2008; Parker et al. 2018; Watson 2019). Directed readings are still essential for guiding in-class discussion of topics like how

to maximize inclusivity of diverse voices and knowledges in research projects (Dunkel 2017; Hardy 2023; Parker et al. 2018; Ruth et al. 2022a) and how to recognize and minimize participants' research fatigue (Damon et al. 2017; Radonic et al. 2023). The works cited in Tables 1 and 2 provide extensive resources for course reading assignments. Those readings and discussions, however, should be supplemented with experiential learning events, like team-based research projects and field trips with community members (Dunkel 2017; Kelemen and Balazs 2008; Ruth et al. 2022a). Another successful model is instructor-guided courses in which students work through their own action research projects (Spencer and Molina 2018). Here, we outline some key recommendations from the faculty focus groups and point to key resources for students and faculty regarding teaching and learning participatory research methods.

Advice for Students

- Be aware of the time it takes to do participatory work.
- Think small at first and incorporate participatory methods instead of executing an entire participatory project.
- Get experience by working on existing participatory projects (see below).
- Read widely and understand the different approaches and methods (see Tables 1 and 2).

Advice for Faculty

- Incorporate discussions about participatory methods in classes and mentoring sessions.
- Consider offering class(es) that train students on participatory methods. Curriculum could include approaches to participatory research (see Table 1), participatory research methods (see Table 2), ethics of participatory research, entering the field (gaining access, building relationships, and identifying gatekeepers), and co-designing research projects, including how to decide on: (1) the research questions, (2) who will collect and analyze data, and (3) who will contribute to the write-up and communication of findings.
- Work with existing long-term community partnerships to develop smaller, well-bounded, participatory projects for student involvement (through class projects).
- Point students in the direction of helpful readings and resources (see Tables 1 and 2, and key resources listed below).

Key Resources for Teaching Participatory Research Methods

- *The Handbook of Teaching Qualitative and Mixed Research Methods: A Step-by-Step Guide for Instructors* (Ruth et al. 2023) includes practical resources for teaching

a range of participatory research methods. These include complete lesson plans and resources for Photovoice, digital storytelling, arts-based methods, Indigenous methodologies, Talanoa, community-engaged participatory research, and Black feminist life history methods. Several of this article's authors contributed to the handbook.

- The CAMP participatory methods curriculum (that formed the backbone of the research reported here) is now freely available at <https://www.youtube.com/@methods4all>. It includes lectures on participatory and digital methods, participatory action research, participatory approaches to direct observation, critical Indigenous research methodologies, talking circles, Indigenous data sovereignty, Indigenous stories, Talanoa, refusal as a method, and abolition as a method.

Despite the many challenges we have highlighted here, there are emerging programs, field schools, and certificates in participatory research to overcome them. These programs enable students to acquire skills in project design and community collaboration (e.g., Copeland and Dengah 2016; Dunkel 2017; Gravlee et al. 2015; Parker et al. 2018; Watson 2019; and search for fields schools and programs in the AnthroGuide at <https://guide.americananthro.org/>). As the literature on teaching and learning participatory methods is growing quickly, each new program and study adds to our capacity to teach participatory methods in anthropology.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates the demand for and the challenges to teaching participatory methods to PhD students. One possible limitation of our analysis is the non-random sample. The 316 PhD students we surveyed were self-selected based on their desire to seek out additional methods training. This may suggest that they are, on balance, less prepared than students who did not apply. However, this is not borne out in the data; these students tended to be from PhD programs that were stronger in methods and more likely to have PhD chairs who taught or published methods papers. We tentatively conclude that student applicants and fellows are perhaps better prepared than average students to learn participatory methods. The faculty we surveyed, too, were all expert methodologists and more likely than average faculty to have thought seriously about teaching various research methods. As such, we conclude our sample might overrepresent students' and professors' ability to teach and learn participatory methods in anthropology—if so, the overall barriers to teaching participatory methods in anthropology may be even greater than those we document here. To improve the teaching and learning of participatory methods, we recommend: (1) research based on open-ended interviews of faculty about their experiences and their tips for managing the challenges; and (2) analyzing the syllabi of participatory methods courses to assess what and how these classes are taught (see Ruth et al. 2022a; 2022b). Another consideration is the challenges facing

anthropology and the social sciences more broadly, including reduced grant funding and institutional program and budget cuts. Thus, relying on readily available resources, highlighted above, will be key.

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Ethics Approval

This study was approved by Arizona State University's IRB (STUDY00012825).

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