***Participation in a Sociocultural Activity***

**Paper #1**

**Objectives**

* to see that human development occurs through a multitude of everyday activities;
* to use and analyze qualitative data;
* to demonstrate your understanding of *The Cultural Nature of Human Development*; and
* to write an analytic paper which proves an argument.

In this paper, you will record part of a sociocultural activity and analyze how the participants participated in it. What does participants’ participation demonstrate about what they know how to do?

**How to Collect Your Data**

You should choose an interaction in which you regularly engage and to which you have access, in as natural a fashion as possible. Do not create an activity for the purpose of this assignment, but pick an activity from the course of your everyday life to record. Two or more people need to be involved, of whom you should be one, but anyone and any activity will do, *because every activity is a sociocultural one,* whether it is watching TV, playing video games, having dinner, catching up with a friend, studying together, attending a Bible study class, etc. In order to analyze the interaction, you will need to record it, whether through audio or video, digital or analog. You also need a substantial slice of the interaction: 20 minutes should be long enough, but feel free to record a longer interaction and only use 20 minutes of it.

Several analog and digital tape recorders are available for 48-hour loan through Sherry Pisacano, the secretary for the Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Criminal Justice, who is generally in the office 8:30-4:30 Monday through Friday (856-225-6470; [pisacano@camden.rutgers.edu](mailto:pisacano@camden.rutgers.edu)). You will have to provide your own tapes (for the analog tape recorders) and batteries.

You will need to explain what you are doing to your fellow participants. You need to get the permission from participants in the situation to make the recording, and if minors are involved, from their guardians. **You may not record without their permission.**Make people comfortable. Tell them about the class and say that you have been asked to record an ordinary, normal interaction in your community. They should just do what they would normally do. Tell them that this is for your benefit, as part of your own education to help you understand how people do ordinary things, and that you’d be very grateful if they could help you out. Tell them that it doesn’t matter what they say (they can use curse words or tell bad jokes, for example), and that only I will have access to the recording. Let them know you will **not** use their real names in the paper.

If people are too nervous or bothered by the recording, try again on another occasion, or record for longer, as they may forget about the presence of the recording device with time.

Immediately after the recording, jot down some notes about the setting afterwards: who was involved in the situation and what the physical setting and emotional atmosphere was like. You’ll also want to listen to the recording as soon as possible afterwards to see if it’s usable. If there are parts that are unclear or unintelligible, you may be able to decipher what was said from memory right afterwards (which you would not be able to do in two weeks). You’ll want to take notes of who is talking at various points (since that too may be hard to remember afterwards), as well as any details not captured by the recording---gestures, movements, facial expressions, entrances or exits of any participants.

You will want to indicate your gratitude afterwards. Depending on your relationship with the other participants in this activity, you may want to send them a nice thank-you note or bring him or her something you know he or she would appreciate, such as baked goods, or buy a round of drinks or coffee.

Do not wait until the last minute to collect your data. You may have mechanical problems with the recording equipment; you may have scheduling problems, given that people are involved. In other words, you may have to try several times before you get a recording you can analyze.

Your data is due **February 14th**. Please give me the physical tape (in an envelope attached to the paper) or send me the digital audio or video file as an attachment by this date. (1%)

**How to Analyze the Interaction**

The big question is: what kind of human development did participants demonstrate in the sociocultural activity through their participation?

Keep in mind that this development could be of several different kinds:

* knowledge of what is expected in this sociocultural activity including available roles and attitude
* particular kinds of abilities and competencies: bodily movements and postures, verbal skills, kinds of thinking and relating
* knowledge of how to interact: turn-taking, teasing or insulting (both how to do it and whether or not it is appropriate), how to get someone to do something, what kinds of rationale are convincing in a debate
* cultural values that are being communicated or reinforced in the activity, perhaps not articulated or commented on during the activity itself, but visible in the way that the activity is structured?

You will want to pay attention to how people participate differently (that is, how people have learned different things): do some dominate while others are quieter? Do some interrupt and others do not? Do some people’s statements require the support of others? Do some people provide care for others and others receive it? Note where in the interaction you see the differences in participation. If there are differences, do these differences correlate with any of the identities salient in this cultural community (major ones in most communities include gender, age, or status)?

You must use Rogoff and other materials presented in class to help you in the analysis, and refer to where you use them. Rogoff’s work will also help you set up your paper, by helping you articulate *why* what is going on in your sociocultural activity is important or significant

Keep in mind Rogoff’s precepts about ethnocentrism. You do not want to use judgmental or normative language about what is better or worse, but rather analyze what is happening neutrally.

**How to Organize your Paper**

*Argument statement*

The thesis of your paper should make a claim about what participants in the sociocultural activity you are analyzing know to do, including any differences in their participation and any evidence for cultural change.

The argument statement is due **February 16th** and is worth 1% of your grade.

*Background*

Then, give an overview of the sociocultural activity in your cultural community. You will want to describe the rules or expectations of this sociocultural activity. For example:

* Where does this tend to take place?
* Who tends to participate? (And who does not?)
* What is the goal of the activity?
* What is the emotional attitude participants are expected to take in the activity?

This description is important as a set-up for your analysis. It may feel silly to you to do so, as you will be pointing out “the obvious,” but doing so will help your reader understand what is going on.

*Analysis of the Interaction*

Here you should provide evidence to support your argument. This means pointing out where in your activity you see participants demonstrate their development and how their development might vary (in terms of their roles, etc). You should **quote** from the recording when necessary, quoting exactly what people say and how they say it, including their stutters, pauses, and curse words. If you have video, you may include a still in the paper, if you want to make a point about bodily posture or spatial arrangements; otherwise, provide a detailed description from your notes.

*Conclusion*

In your conclusion, you should restate the major points from your analysis, using different words. You can be more specific here than you were in the introduction now that you have developed your argument in the paper. (Note how Rogoff re-states her argument, varying her word choice.)

**How I Will Evaluate Your Paper**

You need to show that you have understood *The Cultural Nature of Human Development*. In order to do that, you will have to show me that you are making use of that text and its ideas in your paper.

Please use consistent citation format, whether MLA, APA, or Chicago. Guidelines are provided as links off the assignment website for this class: http://caticoe.rutgers.edu/courses/sociology-of-education/sociology-of-education-assignments/

Your grade will be dependent on (in this order of importance):

* your understanding of the concepts discussed in *The Cultural Nature of Human Development*;
* providing an insightful analysis of the sociocultural activity;
* having a clear statement of argument and proving your argument through your evidence; and
* not using evaluative and judgmental language.

**Due: February 23rd** (18%)