

Teaching/Learning Matters

ASA's Newsletter for the



Section On Teaching &
Learning In Sociology

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SECTION CHAIR'S CORNER

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Colleagues:

I hope your classes are going well as winter relents to spring. Our annual meetings will be here before we know it and Montreal is going to be a terrific venue. If you have not visited this city it is a delight from the architecture to the European traditions in cuisine to the history and cultural identity. Keep in mind that passports are expected for those flying to Canada.

First, I want to update you on the plans for the annual meetings and work of the Section. We are planning a joint reception with the Sociology of Education Section on **Sunday, August 13th**. Details will follow but we anticipate a late afternoon gathering with opportunity for building those "weak ties", enjoying some refreshment and perhaps winning a book. Our Section Council meeting is later that night; Section officers should plan accordingly. Our Section Day is Sunday August 13th. Our thanks go to Keith Roberts, Chair of the Co-operative Initiatives Committee for leading this joint venture. At the same time, John Zipp, Program Chair, has been working hard with colleagues to insure a strong program of sessions sponsored by the Section. You are also invited to attend the Section Business meeting to share your ideas and comments and to hear the talk of Mauksch Award winner Greg Weiss of Roanoke College. Knowing Greg, I can promise his talk will be wonderful. We hope many of you will be able to join us.

Second, we realize, of course, that not everyone can attend the annual meetings and we hope that this newsletter and other regional opportunities will be another way for the Section to serve you. At last count, we are 557 members strong and we hope that number will grow. If you have not renewed for 2006

please do so and encourage your colleagues to support the Section on Teaching and Learning. Many kudos to our excellent membership committee currently chaired by Susan St. John of Corning Community College and to previous membership committee members. I continue to argue that we should be the largest section of ASA—effective teaching *is* intellectual work and our success, as Michael Buroway suggests, is to think of our students as our first and perhaps most important publics. As I bring up every chance I get, Herbert Gans made this case years ago and it is an even more critical claim today. Gans wrote in his 1988 ASA Presidential Address "Although the teaching of sociology has still not obtained enough respect from the discipline, the fact remains that virtually all academic sociologists, including those at the most elite research universities, earn their living by teaching." To teach effectively and honorably requires time, intellectual commitment, knowledge, and professional teaching development. We encourage everyone to practice and promote effective teaching and learning with the intellectual standards it demands.

Third, I again invite your ideas for the Section and about teaching and learning in sociology, both scholarship and practice. One idea I personally have been trying to apply this term is some of John Tagg's work on deep learning. If you haven't encountered this idea you might check out the following review as a place to begin. Here is an example of the importance of good intellectual work in teaching and learning. http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/review_of_higher_education/v027/27.2barefoot.htm

In closing then, enjoy the months ahead and keep us posted. As Minnesota's Garrison Keillor says—"Be well. Do good work. And stay in touch."

Best regards,
Diane Pike – Section Chair 05-06

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EDITOR'S NOTE

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As I review this issue's contents, I am struck by section members' passion, talent, and extraordinary efforts as teachers and scholars. Jeff Chin's column about studying classroom successes, from the perspective of research on learning and pedagogy, aptly illustrates the potentially fruitful direction for advancing the scholarship of teaching and learning. I encourage all our readers to develop such a project and to submit their observations for publication to *Teaching Sociology* or to this newsletter. More importantly, let's show how important our teaching is by researching it and publishing our work!

Additionally, this issue is packed with compelling discussions, interesting articles, and a relevant documentary review. We have several submissions concerning teaching practices as well as pedagogical issues. Each writer contacted me with ideas for a submission and together we formulated the columns you are reading today. Send us your thoughts and comments for inclusion in the next issue. Also – I would like to hear your thoughts on Monte Bute's Point/Counterpoint column. Again – I encourage section members to consider *Teaching/Learning Matters* as a source for publishing your own ideas. Your submissions can then be listed as "Editor-Reviewed" articles for inclusion on your vitae.

Finally – I worked with a subcommittee of the section's publication committee to determine the future direction of the newsletter. A great hearty thanks to the subcommittee members – Stephen Sweet, Helen Moore, and Monte Bute. They were informative, offered provocative suggestions, and were extra-ordinarily supportive of the newsletter. We will continue publishing the newsletter three times a year. We hope to increase the number of substantive articles across a range of topics with the goal of making the newsletter one of the attractions to joining the section.

SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

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The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL):
Collecting Assessment Data

This is the third and last column of a series of my columns on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) for the ASA's section on Teaching and Learning

newsletter. In my first column, I wrote about communities in SoTL. In my previous column, I wrote about getting published in SoTL. In this last column, I will write about how to collect data for a SoTL project. The first series of columns by Kathleen McKinney provide foundational discussion on SoTL and are must reading for anyone interested in an overview of SoTL. [Editorial note: copies of these columns are available from either myself or Kathleen McKinney.]

Embarking into any new area of research is daunting. For many junior faculty or even senior faculty for whom the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) is appealing but new, there may be some significant start-up costs. If SoTL is: “systematic reflection on teaching and learning made public” (<http://www.sotl.ilstu.edu/>, retrieved 3/2/06), then many of the activities that most professors engage in regularly can be the basis for research projects in SoTL. The trick is to carry through on all of the components laid out in this definition. By happy coincidence, this can also help people think about assessment.

Like any other research, research on the SoTL involves careful and systematic thinking about the problem. Faculty often tell me that they have a terrific teaching technique and do I think it could be published in *Teaching Sociology*? While I am sure that it worked well, in order to become a publishable paper, an idea needs to have data. This, of course, is no different from any other sociological research paper. But sometimes people are under the mistaken impression that because I tried it and I liked it, and even more compelling, that my students liked it or benefited from it, that it ought to receive a favorable review from a journal on pedagogy. As I mentioned in my previous column, an essential element of papers submitted to any journal is evidence of effectiveness. What can that be for a SoTL project?

Start with Goals or Objectives

To answer that question, we need to back up, decide and then articulate what it is we’re looking for. Think of it in the same way that you might think of constructing a syllabus. What are your goals for the course? What do you want students to know after taking it? How does it fit into the larger context of your curriculum?

Too often we structure a course along the lines of the chapters of a textbook we like. But textbooks may or may not share the same logic for what a student may need to know about a particular subject area. For example, most intro textbooks are structured along the lines of “flavor of the week.” This is because textbooks are written to sell (and that is a long

conversation for another day) not necessarily to meet the goals of a course, especially yours. It is important to remember that textbooks, like any other teaching materials, are supposed to support the teacher in presenting the material. The teacher should use the textbooks to **support** the goals of the course, not **determine** the goals.

An Example

I recently decided that an activity that I have been doing for years was pretty effective but I had no data to support it. So for the balance of this column, I will use my own thinking for turning this idea for what I think is a pretty successful teaching technique into what I hope will be an acceptable SoTL paper.

Assuming that we’re talking about a teaching technique, what are the goals of the technique? SoTL research, like constructing a course syllabus, should begin with a set of learning objectives. (If this paper is beginning to sound like the language of assessment, that is the point.) What do you want students to know or be able to do after being exposed to this particular set of materials? And again, to illustrate how this activity parallels syllabus construction, this is not a set of objectives for the activity (or for a syllabus, course objectives) but **student** learning objectives. This could be a series of bullet points such as:

- After completing this activity, students will be better able to articulate (a particular author’s) theory than before the activity.
- After completing this activity, students will be better able to articulate an answer to the question: “What (according to a particular author) is deviance?” and “What (again, according to this particular author) causes deviance?” better than before the activity.
- After completing this activity, students will be better able to articulate the role of social class in critical theory.

Having articulated what the objectives are, how do we intend to measure them? Sociologists arguably have some of the best training to answer this question. Our training typically exposes us to multiple types of data collection techniques.

I decided to give my students a non-graded assessment consisting of about 10 questions on critical theory, the topic that the activity was designed to support and one that students typically have difficulty with. After the activity, I gave them the same assessment with a few additional questions specifically about the activity. (Since this happened just prior to writing this column, I can not report on either the effectiveness of the activity or more importantly, the

effectiveness of the data collection technique for this column.)

Other data collection strategies include analyzing test data. The Dundes and Harlow (2005) paper on Starpower I cited in my previous column did this: they essentially conducted a content analysis of the essay portions of their students' final exams. Some instructors have their students construct portfolios of their work and these can be the basis for a rich SoTL database. Many papers on SoTL benefit from an instructor having multiple sections of the same course. They create an experimental/control group situation and try to make inferences based on different outcomes of the two sections. Another technique that could be used in place or in conjunction with any of these is focus groups.¹

What this non-exhaustive list of possible data collection techniques is designed to illustrate is that as social scientists, we are familiar with many ways to collect data and it is up to the researcher to determine what technique is best for a particular project. There is no "one size fits all".

Finally, one thing worth mentioning as a footnote to all of this discussion is the importance of making sure that whatever data collection technique you use has been approved by your institution's Institutional Review Board.

I end with an invitation to participate in continuing dialogue. I want to stress the importance of the concept of community that I discussed in my first column. Whether in private emails or in a public forum like the electronic discussion list TEACHSOC, in *Teaching Sociology* or at the annual meeting, I encourage you to participate in the dialogue that makes this topic, indeed, this section and the teaching community a vibrant one.

I want to thank your editor, Anne Eisenberg, for inviting me to write this column and you, the readers, for reading. Send me your comments and I will respond to them or send them to Anne and they may become the basis for an item in a future edition of the newsletter.

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¹ It is generally preferable to use assessment instruments that are not tied to student grades because it conflates two competing interests, grade distribution and collecting meaningful data for the research.

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PEDAGOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND CLASSROOM TEACHING

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Exploring Sociology's Theoretical Imagination (with Mikhail Bakhtin)

Students typically struggle with sociological theory. This seems to be due to a combination of factors including the nature and complexity of the subject matter, how it is taught, and the fact that students often lack the sociological literacy, self-directedness, and higher order thinking skills necessary to succeed. Student underpreparedness and disengagement often compels us to resort to traditional teacher-centered lecture based instruction that further disengages students. In what follows, I will consider Russian philosopher, literary critic, and teacher Mikhail M. Bakhtin's notion of *creative thinking* and affiliated theorizations as an active-learning alternative particularly well suited for exploring sociology's theoretical imagination.

To invoke Bakhtin might at first seem a bit odd. To him the tidy decontextualized world of pure theoretical cognition is suspect; he instead favored a contextual understanding of lived experience. What intrigued him most was the immediacy of the open-ended, messy, and utterly unpredictable qualities of real-world events. He uses the term *eventness* to describe the idiosyncrasies and concrete particularity of lived experience. Universal concepts and nomological propositions, he believed, suppress *eventness*; they exclude, in his words, "the participative experience of the performed act" (Sidorkin 2004, 259) of thinking. Clearly, for Bakhtin - as for our students - theories are lifeless and dry. In the 'theoretical world,' Bakhtin concludes, "I am unnecessary...as if I did not exist." (Sidorkin 2004, 257) So why Bakhtin? As it turns out he does not reject theory per se. Rather he rejects the breach that has come to exist between theory and the lived world. The goal of the *act of* theorizing and of the theoretical imagination more generally is to bring theories into communion with lived experience. Contained in Bakhtin's insistence on the primacy of *applying* theory to understand the real world are, I submit, the fundamentals of a more learner-centered andragogical approach to teaching theory.

As an educator, Bakhtin favored participative learning where students actively partake in the thought process. Even if thoughtfully prepared and delivered, lectures are mere monologues; the ready-made thoughts of our discipline's canonical thinkers domesticated and reverently bird-fed to students by us - the gate-keepers of sociology's sacred texts. The lecture format is especially appealing where theory courses are concerned. The complexity of the subject matter along with sociology's jargon-rich prose makes it very difficult for most students to understand what we assign. Bakhtin abhors such texts; his preference is for more accessible, "prosaic" writing that invites participative engagement. It is in these lively and occasionally "carnavalesque" surroundings where Bakhtin's notion of *creative thinking* truly takes root. Creative thinking is quintessentially dialogical; it does not reside in any *one* individual nor does it ever result from a passive reception of meaning. Consequently, there is never just one correct (and final) reading of the text; no monologue that can be lectured to students. I find this realization of the sheer *unfinalizability* (Bakhtin) of the text quite empowering.

My primary concern in this piece is how we might help students relate more *productively* to the texts we assign and how we can subsequently engage them in dialogue. Bakhtin uses the term *vzhivanie* or *living into* the text to entertain the possibility of a more creative stance towards reading. Living into the text is an intensely active and – when successful- empowering reading where we participate fully in the text without losing sight of our own *outsideness* (i.e. one's unique perspective as an outsider). The object is not to simply understand the text's supposedly fixed, predetermined meaning (authorial intent), but to enter into a dialogue wherein the perspectives of self and other blend and clash to *create* something genuinely new and personally meaningful.

There are many ways in which we can promote creative thinking in our students. Since creative thought issues from dialogue, lecture based instruction must give way to student-centered cooperative ways of learning. As educators, our primary goal is to help students learn to value the eventness of their own live experiences as necessary starting point for exploring sociological theory. It is the eventness of real world contexts that make otherwise abstract, decontextualized theories eventful and relevant to our lives. Only if we can fully relate to theories and boldly apply them, can we engage in truly creative thought. As a consequence, much of what happens in the theory classroom needs to be geared towards bridging the gap believed to exist between real world events and the world of theory. In my own theory course, I am adding a Service Learning component to give

students an opportunity to learn theory phronetically by stepping into the real world beyond the confines of the classroom. I am also an advocate of community-based research as a way to reach out to one's community, demonstrate the vital link between theory and research, and lastly to impress upon my students Kurt Lewin's often cited aphorism that "*there is nothing as practical as a good theory.*" (Harkavy and Benson 1997, 9) Lest we forget, in Bakhtin's *Philosophy of the Act*, thinking is an activity; something one does in the real world. To demonstrate this, I have students keep ethnographic diaries in which they *use* theories and theoretical concepts to reflect on themselves and the social world they live in. In the past I have also used sociodrama as an experiential group-as-a-whole learning technique where theories are "acted out" in a thespian bid to better confront social problems such as eating disorders, domestic violence, or poverty. Finally, rather than lecturing on a given theorist, theory, or theoretical perspective, I have students team up in groups to do presentations on how sociological theories can be used to think about anything from the war in Iraq, to ipods, to college binge drinking.

In all of the above, there is an unwavering emphasis on making theory *eventful*. Often considered dry and overly cerebral, sociological theory at last is allowed to come alive! What once confronted students as uneventful chicanery, a hoop to jump through, now becomes a creative Bakhtinian tool with which to understand one's own world and the world of others better.

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PEDAGOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND THE INSTITUTIONS WITHIN WHICH WE WORK

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Who Dares to Engage in Radical Pedagogy?

(NOTE: This article will also be published in the 2nd edition of *Critical Pedagogy in the Sociology Classroom*)

It is now nearly ten years since I wrote "Practicing Radical Pedagogy," an article that outlined the challenge of melding a radical political philosophy with conservative institutional practices (Sweet 1998). My observations then - and now - lead me to the same conclusion: Many sociology teachers "talk the talk" of being radicals, but far fewer of us "walk the walk." Self-described radical, critical, and feminist sociologists are comfortable assigning texts that criticize power structures, to provide lectures on radical theory, and to dialogue with students. But we are much less secure in our right and ability to push students into roles as activists, to link class work to social change, and to rework the taken-for-granted hidden curriculum that legitimates social inequality.

Given the tension between political ideals and institutional constraints, I suggested that self-identified radical teachers follow a "third path." This pragmatic approach involves staying as true as one can to one's ideals, while recognizing the need to respect and navigate job designs, student cultures, and colleague's expectations. This balancing act requires modifying radical pedagogical approaches to satisfy existing institutional practices. Not all liked my thesis and recommendations (Gimenez 1989), but I remain convinced that they were correct.

My sense is that two things have changed since the time that I wrote "Practicing Radical Pedagogy." One important development has been a loosening of the cultural confines on what qualifies as good teaching. There appears to be a greater acceptance - and expectation - that students will receive something beyond the traditional teacher-centered experience. The *American Sociological Association's Task Force on the Undergraduate Major*, for example, recommends the development of diverse pedagogical methodologies and the breaching classroom confines (McKinney, Howery, Strand, Kain, and Berheide 2004). Expectations for service learning are more common than a decade ago, as is the acceptance of the Boyer model that values such work (Boyer 1990; Strand 2003). Michael Burowoy's (2005) agenda for public sociology has stressed the need to change both the content of what is taught, as well as the methods of teaching it (see also Feagan and Vera 2001). This is all good news for teachers who want to challenge inequalities not only with words, but with innovative pedagogies.

But while the confines of teaching have loosened, the stakes of challenging institutionalized practices have escalated. The labor market for academics is saturated with applicants and far larger proportions of sociology teachers are employed in insecure positions (Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac 2004). Untenured teachers are commonly tied to spouses, many of whom also seek, or hold, jobs in colleges and universities. In this context the loss of one person's job can dislodge two careers (Sweet and Moen 2004; Sweet, Moen, and Meiksins Forthcoming). With the stakes being so high, non-tenured faculty are finding a need to be hyper-sensitive to students', colleagues', and administrators' opinions of their work and conduct. As I discussed in "Practicing Radical Pedagogy," this puts radical teachers especially at risk because the nature of their pedagogies tend to be more time consuming, and also put them at odds with existing college policy and practice.

While non-tenured faculty have greater opportunities to expect more from their students and to implement a more diverse range of experiences, they do so at risk falling off - or never getting on - career tracks that lead to the security of a tenured appointment. What is a radical teacher to do? Hold fast to their political commitments or diligently satisfy the institutionalized expectations that run counter to their ideals? One wonders about the limit to which one can push new approaches to teaching, which pulls from time spent with family and research. One also wonders the point at which compromise stops and selling out begins. The challenge of balancing ideals within institutional constraints remains.

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TEACHING POINTS

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Asking "Dumb" Questions

"Is anyone planning on cheating or plagiarizing this semester? Can I see a show of hands?" These are the first two in a series of "dumb" questions that I ask my students beginning on the first day of class and continuing throughout the semester. I ask these particular two on the first day for several reasons. First, it gets their attention about serious, academic

concerns right away and in a unique manner. Second, by doing so, I "spit into their soup;" a gestalt-ish way of spoiling their attempt to play the entrenched, institutional game of, "What, *me* cheat???" Third, it's a fun way to break the ice with students and fourth, and most importantly, it introduces them to the idea that sociologists, for the most part, like to ask "dumb" (or obvious) questions.

It is this latter point that is the most pedagogically relevant to me. I want my students to know that sociologists don't (or shouldn't) take anything for granted. It is our job to question the mundane, the ordinary, the "unthinkable." In this case the unthinkable is not speculation on some future horrific event. Rather, it is the taken-for-granted, non-obvious, social reality that we are all immersed in; the encompassing reality that is so familiar, that we don't think about it, i.e., it is unthinkable.

I see asking questions like these as a version of the breaching experiments, made famous by Garfinkel and other ethnomethodologists (Garfinkel, 1967). One way that students can learn about social reality is to have a direct experience of what happens when it is disrupted. This (albeit brief) disruption permits them a glimpse into the world that all of us inhabit and take for granted (see Schutz, 1967 for more on this). A visceral experience such as this also allows insight into oneself (Glass, 2005). Sociology need not be all about statistics, tables, and graphs.

"Isn't it amazing that we all showed up at the same place, on the same day, at the same time, with the same idea of what we were going to do, and all of us had expectations about what each of us are going to be doing even though most of us have never met each other before?" Now, students don't think that this is so amazing, heck they're in school; of course they are going to show up for class (or not!). By posing the question, however, particularly in this manner, they begin to get a sense of what the discipline of sociology is interested in. I typically follow this question with the observation, "Of all the possible choices that you have in your life of things to do, you all decided to come here, to this place, now...why?" It is at this point that I begin to talk about social structure and the effect that it has on our lives, our chances, and our choices. Fairly quickly, it becomes obvious that such a seemingly ridiculous question actually makes a lot of sense.

This is one way of introducing the impact of structure and context on one's life; fundamental sociological ideas demonstrated by empirical evidence (Webster, Freeman, Aufdemberg, 2001). As many of us know, most students are unaware that much of their action is bounded by social constraints.

"Is this a class? How do we know it is? Are we doing anything to make this a class or does it exist as a class all by itself without us? Does the room we are in make it a class?" These question leads to a discussion of how our taken-for-granted reality is precisely that, a taken-for-granted reality. Students are, at first bewildered that a professor would ask such a ridiculous question. Of course this is a class, what else would it be? But then, as they begin to discover that the reason we think it is a class is really what *makes* it a class, that it is not a class simply because learning allegedly occurs there, they begin to get a sense of how we all contribute to creating this thing called society, and more specifically, this thing called social reality.

To further this line of thinking, I then ask, "If we were to fly over the school and look down, what would we see? Would we see a 'school,' or would we see buildings, cars, people, trees, etc. If this is what we see, then what makes this location a 'school'?" Typically, by this time, most students get what I am talking about. Again, they have had an opportunity to reflect on how the seemingly stable, ordered world that we encounter everyday is really an ongoing creation of people interacting with one another.

This last line of questioning is of course, reflective of the social constructionist perspective, perhaps best discussed by Berger and Luckmann (1967). Typically, within this discussion, I also tie in the notion of "objects," the college being one of them, and how they are inherently meaningless, i.e., the meaning of an object does not reside in the object. I discuss how we as members of varying social groups bring meaning to objects and how the meaning that we bring is derived from our interaction with others (Blumer, 1969).

To conclude...what are some of the pedagogical benefits of asking stupid questions like these? I believe that they are the following:

- They peel back the thin layer of taken-for-granted reality that we all move around in.
- They permit students a glimpse of themselves and their behavior in a new way.
- They allow students to awaken from, however momentarily, the structurally-induced slumber of the numbing effects of behavioral routinization that all of us engage in.
- They viscerally introduce the sociological imagination
- They increase students' interest in learning in general and in learning more about sociology

Some of the responses I have had from students are laughter, actual raising of hands in response to the question on cheating, and perplexed facial expressions.

Related responses have included, "how do you live knowing all of this," "this is fun!" and my favorite, "I may be failing your class, but I am learning a lot."

Needless to say, these are not the extent of stupid questions that one can ask. New ones pop into my head frequently (no comments). For instance, just this past week, I ask my students (in all sincerity), "Why do we expect kids to thank someone who compliments them on the color of their eyes? The kids didn't have anything to do with making their eyes; typically, we give compliments to others to acknowledge their achievements or accomplishments. If kids were not responsible for making their own eyes, then why the compliment? And more importantly, why the expectation of thanks in return for the compliment? This doesn't make any sense."

Ironically, this series of questions had little to do with the advancement of their sociological awareness and all to do with mine. I have always wondered about this issue. After listening to the answers my students gave, I assured them, that I too remain a student of sociology and social reality, even after 25 years of formal education; as sometimes, social reality even baffles me. I suspect this is why I am a sociologist.

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POINT/COUNTERPOINT 

POINT-COUNTERPOINT

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Editor's Note: Monte Bute discusses an interesting point concerning the Section on Teaching and Learning. I am interested in hearing from people who want to present the counterpoint to his argument.

From Interest Group to Social Movement, Redux?

I've become increasingly troubled by the direction of the Section on Teaching and Learning in Sociology. Initially, I couldn't quite put my finger on the reasons for my discontent. I admire the section for having restored the lost arts of teaching and learning to a position of respect within the profession. Additionally, I find its members welcoming, collegial, and engaging. So why do I still feel like such a contrarian?

The answer came to me last summer in Philadelphia while attending the American Sociological Association's (ASA) Centennial Session on teaching sociology. It was the subtitle of Carla Howery's (2005) presentation that helped crystallize my revisionist urges: "From Interest Group to Scholarly Specialty." Howery, Deputy Executive Director of ASA, got it at least half right—we certainly have become a scholarly specialty. What she got wrong, however, is the notion that we started as an interest group. In fact, we started as a social movement, one that sought to transform both sociology and higher education. What we have become, unfortunately, is just another interest group feeding at the profession's trough.

As I review recent volumes of *Teaching/Learning Matters* and *Teaching Sociology*, I find a retrograde obsession with the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) and its associated research agendas: student assessment, faculty assessment, core curriculum, faculty rewards, and even the scientific rigor—or lack thereof—of *Teaching Sociology* articles. In a recent section newsletter, an author uses the adjective "scholarly" no less than three times in a single sentence and seven times in a six-sentence paragraph (McKinney 2003:6). Marx would likely have called this a "fetishism of scholarship."

All this talk of "measurement," "predictors," "effectiveness of evidence," and "can you prove it" sounds suspiciously like an unreconstructed conversation from the 1950s or 1960s. Where is all this heading: the establishment of a core curriculum; national assessment tests; universal criteria for faculty

assessment? Are we aiming for a "one-size-fits-all sociology?" I wonder how Socrates, Buddha, Jane Addams, or W.E.B. Du Bois would measure up under the rigorous scrutiny of the SoTL crowd.

We have forgotten our roots; we are becoming what our progenitors once revolted against. Let me provide some history. In 1968, Christopher Jencks and David Riesman were busy asserting that a "revolution" had taken place in American higher education. What these Harvard sociologists were actually referring to was the two dozen research universities that had become "remarkably similar in what they encourage and value." These universities were turning out Ph.D.s with "quite similar ideas about what their discipline covers, how it should be taught, and how its frontiers should be advanced." The Ph.D.s in any given discipline "were not only like-minded at the outset, but they established machinery for remaining like-minded" (1968:13-14). Jencks and Riesman heralded this hegemonic consolidation as the "near-triumph of academic professionalism" (1968:257).

Not everyone was quite as ready as Jencks and Riesman to classify this as a revolution. Young activists in colleges and universities across the country saw these changes as little more than the social pathologies of hyper-specialization and self-absorbed careerism. The corollary of this academic professionalism was a social amnesia about public issues of the day. These grievances with academia were increasingly organized into protests. The contentious ASA meetings of 1968 and 1969 brought this growing revolt to the heart of our discipline and profession.

What eventually emerged was a social movement seeking to transform higher education. What was particularly disturbing to critics of this new research university was its mantra of "publish or perish." The corresponding reward structure had re-ordered the priorities for academic labor: 1) research; 2) more research; 3) still more research. This new "gold standard" effectively reduced teaching (particularly the teaching of undergraduates) to a fourth-rate activity, drudgery best reserved for the profession's lumpenproletariat—graduate assistants and adjuncts. The one issue (aside from the Vietnam War) that served to unite dissident sociologists with all other academic activists of the day was the abysmal state of undergraduate education. For those section members who are either unaware or have forgotten, Edward L. Kain reminds us of both our roots and history:

The Projects on Teaching emerged from a grassroots social movement involving sociologists who felt that teaching did not receive the attention and support that was merited within our field. This *predated and*

foreshadowed both the assessment movement and the establishment of SOTL. This social movement became institutionalized in a variety of ways . . . (2005:420)

Unfortunately, like the routinization of charisma, institutionalization tends to eventually reduce social movements to either traditional or rational organizations. Consequently, the ideal and material interests of a second generation of leaders and followers gravitate toward an interest-group mentality and a narrow careerism. The point is that reflexivity about teaching and learning need not be confused with SoTL's growing cottage industry of scientism. The Section on Teaching and Learning in Sociology must cease emulating the elitist paradigm of practice that dominates ASA and the profession and begin transforming itself from an interest group back into a social movement.

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DOCUMENTARY REVIEW

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Lester F. Ward: A Life's Journey (110 minutes), a documentary created by Dr. Gale P. Largey of Mansfield University, chronicles the life and ideas of Lester F. Ward, the first president of the American Sociological Association (ASA)² and a founding father

² At that time termed the American Sociological Society, or ASS, as Ward drolly observes. It apparently did not take much time for Ward and his contemporaries to initiate a name change for the organization.

of the American sociological perspective. Ward's story, told via his writings, speeches, and diligently-recorded, lifelong diary, is a welcome addition to the Marx/Weber/Durkheim version of sociology's intellectual origins that is typically proffered in sociology theory courses. Especially informative is the way that Ward's ideas are painstakingly situated in the historical perspective of his life experiences (1841-1913). More than just a sociologist, Ward was also a botanist. He had a long career in the federal government as a paleontologist and was largely self-educated in botany, archaeology, and social science. Eventually, he did earn an A.B. and an A.M. from Columbian College (now The George Washington University) and later taught sociology classes at Brown University, where he taught with such passion that he even enjoyed living within a dormitory amidst his students until days before his death.

Ward's sociological life can be characterized by three motifs: a passion for egalitarianism—in particular that of women to men, staunch resistance to the eugenics movement and the racist and classist ideals it embodied, and the ability to recognize—even at the dawn of the 20th century—the need for public sociology. The fact that the ASA is still beating the call to public sociology 100 years later testifies to how much work remains to be done by professional sociologists to ensure that we better serve the public good. This film is insightful precisely because so much of it could aptly be describing or critiquing our own era of rationalizations for genetic manipulation and designer babies, decries of Affirmative Action programs as no longer needed and even unfair, movements to eliminate or greatly reduce women's access not only to abortion but even to contraception, and cries of, "War!" to solve our international challenges.

Lester himself acknowledges that he and his first wife, Lizzie, "took a remedy" to their first child when Lizzie realized she was pregnant just as Ward was recovering from being shot and captured during the Civil War. Feeling they had little means to support a child, they felt it reasonable to postpone childbearing until about a year later, when Lizzie bore a son. Ward felt strongly that women should and would, eventually, have the same educational opportunities as men, as well as full control over their own "persons and bodies." The section of the film in which he imagines how a gynocentric society might look would make an interesting addition to a women's studies course, particularly if paired with some of Ward's related writings as well as more current perspectives of women theorists such as Patricia Hill Collins. Ward, who avidly encouraged female academics, was lambasted as a "gynocrat" by his male peers; are his ideas less inflammatory today?

Though this film is quite long, there are parts of it that could quite productively be used in a range of sociology courses. And, ultimately, it is a film that every American sociology major should see so as to garner a better sense of the discipline's roots in American society. In an introductory course, the portion of the film discussing Ward's critique of the positivism of Comte and the eugenicist perspective of Spencer and, more decidedly, of Sumner, who followed Ward as ASA president, would do much to fill in the void in the intellectual history of early American social science that is too often white-washed to reduce the specter of power and influence that the eugenics movement held. Modern Americans like to imagine that it was the Europeans and, specifically, the Nazis, who embraced eugenics, but America's social elite, intellectuals, and policies were right in goose-step with many of its European counterparts.

Certainly, in theory courses and criminology and deviant behavior courses, the history of the American eugenics movement is something we should be candidly discussing as our students attempt to understand the 21st century's powerful mix of technological "breakthroughs" that already routinely allow designer babies and triplets for 42-year-old moms, ideologically-driven policy sensibilities, and perceptions of dwindling medical, energy, and water supplies. A robust discussion of the American eugenics movement might include a viewing of the film version of T. C. Boyle's book *The Road to Wellville* (and/or a reading of the book itself, as well). Additionally, *Oryx and Crake*, by Margaret Atwood, is an excellent treatment of where our modern-day powers over genes, science, and technology might lead us, in the not-so-distant future.

Finally, this film and Ward's work might connect best to sociology of education courses. Ward's remonstrance of Social Darwinism extended from his own firm belief that education was the great equalizer of a civilization— that everyone had a raw talent for great things, a talent that simply needed to be identified and honed. From a family of modest means himself, Ward spent much of his early life as a working-class man. He and his brothers were self-taught, and it was Ward's great dream to acquire a university education. The debate over who merits the top university spots rages on in this country just as the door to so many other colleges and universities are being flung open to accommodate "non-traditional" students.

Educating a much wider range of student is a task now falling upon many of us who were trained at top-tier institutions but are now working at colleges and

universities with an open admissions policy (or very nearly such a policy). At conferences lately, I hear many complaints by faculty of ill-prepared students. And I see ever more books about the declining American academy. But I wonder if it is not just the students but also us as teachers who must prepare ourselves to better serve the 21st-century student population. I have to imagine that Ward, in his 19th-century world, could only have dreamed of a time and place where people like himself could easily find access to an education. The question now: is that education still the golden key it once was? And are those of us who are educators committed to ensuring that it might be?

More information about Ward, including links to Ward's Presidential Addresses to the ASA and a bibliography of his many writings can be found on the ASA web site at:

<http://www.asanet.org/page.wv?name=Lester+F.+Ward§ion=Presidents>

Information about purchasing this documentary can be found at Dr. Largey's web site:

<http://www.galelargey.com/>, by clicking "Documentaries" and then the Lester Ward film link. The cost for this documentary is \$29.95 for purchase by individuals and \$39.95 for purchase by libraries. I am *unhappy* to report that the film is **NOT** captioned. As an instructor at Gallaudet University, a "CC" (closed-caption) notation is the first thing I look for on a film's jacket. Without it, I cannot show the film in my classes. In this post-ADA era, I am certain that many other instructors have deaf or hard-of-hearing students in their classes as well, rendering great films that have no captions inaccessible. This seems especially un-fitting for a film celebrating the life of a man who was so avidly supportive of equal access to educational resources.

SECTION NEWS AND NOTES

Renew Your Membership!

We encourage all section members to join us in recruiting new people to join the section. As Chairperson Diane Pike is known for saying, EVERY sociologist who teaches should belong to the section. Help us in "spreading the word" about the section and its many benefits. We are the leaders in the scholarship of teaching and learning work as well as some of the most talented teachers. Additionally, the section newsletter provides compelling and interesting items to section members that you cannot get anywhere else. Finally, the journal of *Teaching Sociology* represents our

interests through its editors (who have all been section members) as well as through its content.

Automatic Enrollment in Section E-Mail

When STLS section members pay their annual dues, including Section membership dues, their email address is automatically added to the email list. This list is used by Section officers to send messages to the entire membership. However, this is not a listserv and therefore membership is not able to send messages to other members. While Section officers value this opportunity to communicate more readily with our membership, we recognize that some of you may prefer to be removed from the list.

To remove yourself from the STLS membership list for mailings, send a message to: infoservice@asanet.org with the following statement in the **body** of your message – ***“Please remove my name and email address from the Section on Teaching and Learning in Sociology announcement list.”*** Then add your name and email address to the message.

CALLS FOR.....

Submissions Sought

Teaching Work and Family: An ASA Resource Manual. Growing attention is being paid to the ways work and family roles intersect, as well as the synergistic and reciprocating dynamics that link workplace and family functioning. We seek articles and notes that detail challenges and strategies of teaching work-family, as well as course syllabi, assignments, classroom activities, and film discussion ideas. Recommendations of articles to reprint are also welcomed. The editors are Stephen Sweet (Ithaca College) and Marcie Pitt-Catsouphes (Boston College). Submit materials (via e-mail in MS Word format) to Stephen Sweet, ssweet@ithaca.edu. Deadline for submissions is June 15, 2006.

Submissions Sought

Please submit suggestions for the Summer/Fall newsletter to Anne Eisenberg (see contact information on the last page). Suggestions for articles, regular features, news items to share with other members, and any other ideas are encouraged and welcome!

Help me make this the best Section newsletter of the ASA.

Join the TEACHSOC Listserv

Established in 1995 by Jeff Chin and Kathleen McKinney, the Teaching Sociology E-mail List – teachsoc – provides a place to discuss and distribute news on teaching sociology. Teachsoc is open to all individuals interested in pedagogy, curriculum, and any other issues related to the teaching of sociology at any level. To join us, please send the command:

Subscribe teachsoc *Alfred Weber*

In the body of an email message addressed to – teachsoc@googlegroups.com substituting your name for Max’s little brother, of course.

MEMBERS’ TEACHING NEWS – AWARDS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Please let the editor know when you or colleagues have been formally recognized.