

Teaching/Learning Matters

ASA's Newsletter for the



**Section On Teaching &
Learning In Sociology**

**Volume 36, Number 2
Fall 2007**

SECTION CHAIR'S CORNER

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Greetings and good news. My first announcement as chair of the section is to let you know that we are now 753 members up from 681 at the end of last year. I'd like to thank all of you but especially Susan St. John Jarvis, chair of the Membership committee and the committee members for all their hard work. Please keep inviting your colleagues to join our section and we can continue to grow. More members means more sessions at the annual ASA meetings. I'd like to welcome all the new members of our section as well welcome back continuing members.

As part of her activities as membership chair, Susan has also had a banner made with our section name and former chair Diane Pike's now institutionalized quote: "if you teach, you belong." The banner is available for display at regional Sociology meetings. I'll be attending the Eastern Sociology Society meetings in New York in 2008 as well as the Sociologists for Women in Society Winter meetings and will carry our banner to those two meetings. If anyone would like to carry it to other regional meetings, please let me know and I'll send it out to you. You can also get membership forms from Susan as well.

Susan St. Jarvis has also energized our list serve. Please continue to utilize it by sending in queries, comments, and suggestions for teaching resources. We'd also like to reserve that space for any job listings rather than cluttering up our announcement list which goes out to all members. If in doubt, just email me and I'll be happy to direct you to the appropriate list.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank out-going chair, John Zipp, for his outstanding leadership. We will continue to rely on him as chair of the nominations committee. He is putting together a terrific slate of candidates for the upcoming election. Thank you, John.

We had a great pre-conference workshop in New York thanks to Betsy Lucal, Kate Linnenberg, and Kerry Strand. The theme was "Teachers Are Made, Not Born" and although focused on newer faculty and graduate students many of us came away reborn. We look forward to the 2008

pre-conference in Boston which is being organized by Kate Linnenberg and her committee.

I'd also like to thank our 2006 Hans Mauksch awardee, Bernice Pescosolido on an inspiring and energizing talk almost at the end of our section sessions on the very last day. Thanks to all our session organizers and speakers for hanging in on that last day. Our reward: next year we are on first in Boston and Betsy Lucal as chair-elect will be organizing our program for Boston. We're also looking forward to the 2007 Hans Mauksch awardee, Maxine Atkinson and her presentation.

Chair John Zipp welcomed all our new council members in our last newsletter but I'd like to extend a welcome as well to our new student representative, Alexis Bender. Thanks to former rep Beth Cavalier for all her work throughout the year and especially for organizing a panel of graduate students on teaching while finishing their dissertation work.

I hope we all have a great year and look forward to working with all of you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section Chair's Corner	1
Officers and Council Members	2
Editor's Comments	2
Global Perspective	2
Community College Perspective	4
Workshop Update	6
Using Technology	7
Reflections Column 1	8
Reflections Column 2	9
Section Notes	11
Calls for	12

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EDITOR'S NOTE

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I want to thank everyone who contributed to the fall edition of the newsletter. I have tried to incorporate a few new initiatives including a column on teaching and learning from a global perspective along with a regular column on technology and teaching. I hope you find both of them interesting to read. I also plan to have a regular column written by award winning teachers and it made sense to ask the 2007 ASA Distinguished Contributions to Teaching Winner Ed Kain to write about teaching. It is a great article and hope you make time to read it. I hope to have more rotating types of columns such as the one on teaching sociological concepts. Please consider writing a response to some of our columns. Overall, I learn something new each and every time I put together a newsletter. Please consider

submitting an article. I am always looking for more “scholarly” oriented articles but I think articles about teaching tips and reflections on teaching are also important. I have learned that setting a specific deadline is very important for putting together a timely newsletter. The next deadline is February 1, 2008. I hope to hear from you and look forward to your ideas.

TEACHING AND LEARNING FROM A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Guest Columnist
Katherine Carter



Newsletter editor is looking for articles for the next newsletter on global sociological teaching and learning topics.

Reflections on Teaching in Ethiopia by Katherine Carter

Teaching in any country at any level poses rewards and satisfactions, challenges and difficulties. These rewards and challenges are magnified in Ethiopia. I have been here for three years and knowing that I am making an important difference in the lives of my students, especially women, keeps me going during difficult times. They tell me, sometimes whispering, “thank you for coming to our country,” “thank you for being a positive role model for me,” “you made us think in a different way today,” “you have given me strength and encouragement,” “you have made me think about my life in a different way,” and “thank you for being open and democratic in the class.”



Students invite me for coffee at the cafeteria and ask about my life in America, my family, my health and most importantly, “*What do you think about Ethiopia?*” and “*Do you like our country?*” I know that Ethiopians are proud people and they love their country. They certainly want foreigners to feel the same. I explain that I love Ethiopia and share some examples. I tell them I am humbled by people’s strength and character in the face of much death and disease. I tell them I am impressed with their sense of togetherness and spirit. I am amazed with their great patience and persistence among extreme bureaucracy. I am in awe of my neighbors who walk out of their shack-like homes everyday with heads held high, securely wrapped in white shawls, off to work or the market or a funeral. I tell them my friend’s child bowed when receiving bread, though he had another spell of malaria. And then the beggars blessed me when I gave them a dime, though they had no shoes. I tell them dignity and pride surrounds difficult living conditions. They beam with happiness.

These special times with students help me through the many challenges, including large classes without resources and other bureaucratic issues. I am told that my first class of

the semester has over 100 students. There is no computer equipment available for power point presentations, no LCD, no microphone. Desks are nailed down in rows. I am lucky – I have a white board and I bring my own dry erase markers. Other class rooms have only board and chalk.

The GNP in Ethiopia is \$110 per year, so students can't afford buying a stack of books at the bookstore each semester. In some towns throughout the country, university students can't even afford to make photocopies. I am fortunate in the capital city. I can give students articles to make copies. That will be one burden off my shoulders.

But one challenge is presented when I make original photocopies from textbooks in the secretary's office. Sometimes she allows me to make copies in peace. Other times I feel her breathing down my neck as she mutters, 'this is a poor country' and glances at my stack of papers to be copied. I know it's a poor country and I feel bad but I need the articles.

Printing also poses challenges. I go to one of my colleague's office, who has the only printer in the department, bring my own paper and hope his patience also doesn't run out with my excessive printing needs.

The semester begins and I meet my 100+ students. They are respectful, quiet and shy, and generally excited to begin the semester. Though Amharic is their mother tongue, they speak in excellent English. High numbers of high school students apply to Addis Ababa University. Only the students with the highest GPA and highest scores from the National High School Exit Exam are accepted. No other criteria are examined. They must also afford the \$20/month tuition which many students can not.

Students' names are difficult to pronounce and to learn. Names such as, "Esu Balew," "Asmamaw" and "Meweded" cause me to stutter. Still, I am determined. The first day I ask them to write their name in large letters on paper with a dark pen. I then ask if I can take a picture of them, holding their name tag. This causes an outburst of laughter. No teacher in their 12 + years of schooling has ever done such a thing. After the commotion, I divide students in groups of ten and guide them to the front of the room to take a quick snap with my camera. Some are too shy to do this. They politely refuse. I am still determined to learn their names throughout the semester.

Some students arrive late and I ask the latecomers if they had a good breakfast of coffee and bread. This causes a good laugh by everyone because generally Ethiopians eat bread (*injera*) three times a day and coffee is connected to important rituals and customs.

I look around the room and see an equal representation of males and females. This pleases me, as in the rural areas, teachers usually have 80% male students and male colleagues, all-male administration, and female secretaries and cleaners. The women in my class have worked hard to get here. They have shown their ability in a culture that tells them it is best if they stay at home.

Throughout the semester I learn that students are accustomed to 'chalk and talk' lectures. I'm not. I am determined for students to have some collaboration, discussion and debates. They resist but I keep pushing. I divide them into groups of 10 and they role play the

perspective of Marx, Durkheim and Weber during the Industrial Revolution. They complain about the preparation for the role play but I won't let up. Finally the groups present their role play and I am authentically impressed. They demonstrate their knowledge of sociological theories, use old clothes as costumes, food and other props. I can see they had fun too.

In feedback papers, some students thank me and wish other teachers would adopt this method. Some explain they have never in their lives done such a thing. Others say it was a complete waste of time and plead that it not be repeated. I understand their reasoning and fears. Each culture has different expectations on teaching and learning, and education in general. It's not right for me to impose my philosophy of teaching on their educational system. But I also know many of them will earn their graduate degrees in the United States. I gently explain that skills such as collaboration, active learning and presentation are expected skills to have in U.S. universities.

I also incorporate my understanding of who they are and what is important to them in the illustrations I give. The Orthodox Church, for example, founded in 4th century AD plays a significant role in the customs and daily life throughout the country. When explaining how Weber viewed rationalization of society, I give a hypothetical example of the Church abandoning custom in favor of results and efficiency.

Students grasp my point because I make it as relevant to their life, which is very different than mine, as I possibly can. They mention this on the end-of-the-semester class evaluations and I am reminded why I love teaching and why I am here in Ethiopia. All of sudden, the challenges of making photocopies and printing don't seem to matter anymore. I am making an important difference in their life, especially the women. I have presented them with a new approach to learning. But more importantly, teaching and living in Ethiopia has presented *me* with valuable lessons in humility. I humbled by people's patience, pride, spirit and character. I am fortunate to be here to learn these lessons. I have learned much more than I have taught.

Bottom note:

Katherine Carter went to Ethiopia in 2004 as an English teacher through the English Language Fellow Program. She taught English until 2006 when she accepted a position in the Department of Sociology/Social Anthropology at Addis Ababa University. She currently teaches Social Policy/Planning I and II, and Contemporary Social Issues. The editor would like to thank her for sharing her teaching experience.

PEDAGOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS FROM THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PERSPECTIVE

Editor is currently seeking articles of related to teaching and learning in community colleges for future editions

Beyond the Syllabus: Preparing Students for Active Learning

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I currently teach at a two-year open access college. I teach traditional, non-traditional and first-generation college students. Teaching is the primary mission of my college and I have been encouraged to be reflective about my teaching, course objectives and class assignments. I generally teach introductory level courses, and in addition to course – specific content, I realize I need to teach students the skills that will help them be successful in upper-division courses. One of my goals as an educator is to assist my students in becoming independent and responsible thinkers. Most of my assignments are designed with this goal in mind. I am committed to engaging students in their own learning and I have developed structures to help students engage in the learning process.

Very early in my career I gravitated towards an active learning model in my approach to teaching. My definition of active learning is any type of instructional strategy that engages students in their own learning. It is not my responsibility to read the textbook to students. I am a resource that should enhance the material the students are being presented in the text. Therefore, I plan weekly group activities and discussions that highlight sociological principles for deeper consideration. As the Internet evolved, I also developed guided Internet assignments (SocioQuests) for my students to explore sociological issues using a variety of reliable sources.

Moving to an active learning environment is plagued with difficulties. I learned about the benefits of an active learning environment at a number of teaching and learning conferences.

Active learning:

1. Maintains student interest;
2. Allows ideas to be shared;
3. Engages students in their own learning;
4. Allows more advanced students to become resources;
5. Promotes cooperative learning;
6. Promotes critical thinking;
7. Provides regular feedback;
8. Allows for greater flexibility;
9. Allows for just-in-time teaching.

This sounds wonderful and many have tried active learning strategies and the outcomes do not always meet our expectations. Not many people talk about the limitations of active learning.

Active learning:

1. Depends on the students capacity and mood for participating;
2. Is time consuming;
3. Requires extensive preparation;
4. Requires Faculty to become facilitators;
5. Depends on STUDENTS COMING TO CLASS PREPARED!

Reviewing these limitations demonstrates that the instructor is only one side of the equation in the active learning environment. Being at a two-year open access college, I came to realize that most students were not prepared for active learning. If we want to engage students in active learning environments then we need to help students prepare to become participants in their own learning.

There are four areas that we must consider in preparing students for the active learning environment. These include:

1. How to understand the active learner role;
2. How to focus and organize textbook readings;
3. How to systematically document their experiences;
4. How to perform self-assessments of their learning.

The Active Learner Role

We need to assist students in understanding the active learner role. Many students join our courses with preconceived ideas about the professor and student roles. In fact, when students are asked about the role of the professor and student, they indicate that a professor should come to class on time, lecture, tell students what was important to know, tell students what is on the test, give multiple choice and true/false exams (maybe a term paper), grade and return papers in a timely fashion, and put them to sleep. Students should come to class on time, take notes, not have to read the text, study for exams (write a term paper, if necessary), be quiet during class and do not ask questions. These are very well established student expectations. When my students learn that I do not have exams, I am asked: Do I have to read the book? Do I have to take notes? If we are going to have an active learning environment, then it is important for us to communicate our expectations. We have to help them be successful.

For an active learning environment to be successful, students must understand the ground rules for classroom participation. How do we expect our students to participate in class? Do we need to give participation points? If so, how will participation points be given? I have used a variety of methods for awarding participation points. The method I find works best is to award students points for attendance. My logic is that if the student is present, they will participate in the class on some level. If they are not attending class, they do not get the benefit of learning from myself or other students.

Students also need to understand their role in the evaluation of other students. When we move to an active learning environment, it is much more likely that students are providing feedback to other students. We have to make certain that students are developing appropriate skills for providing feedback. We certainly do not want students

demeaning the contributions of other students. There are several ways that you can communicate guidelines for student feedback. I usually develop a feedback rubric that students complete. For example, in some of my classes my students evaluate each other's oral presentations. I provide a rubric that lists the elements of a good presentation. As students listen to the presentation, they complete the form. I review the forms and give the forms to the presenter without identifying the evaluators. To make certain that the students are not inflating the grades, I indicate they must match my rating within a given range of points. You can also have the students develop the criteria that will be used for the evaluation.

A final active learning role is that of group participant. Many students are not pleased to find they must work in groups. To help overcome some of the problems associated with group work, I structure groups. I define the important statuses within the group and make certain each student fulfills each status at least once in the term. For example, you might identify a facilitator who is responsible for making certain everyone in the group has contributed to the group work. A recorder would take notes on the group discussion and provide notes to the other students. A presenter would present the group's ideas to the rest of the class. I do calculate a group participation score as part of the final grade. However, I allow students to develop the criteria and evaluate their group members. This relates to the ideas presented above on student-to-student feedback. Most often, I require groups to turn in a final group product (worksheet, summary of group discussion, or application question) and I grade the final group product.

Textbook: Focus and Organization

One of the most obvious limitations and obstacles for us to overcome is the question: How do I cover the material in the textbook? There is so much of the text that my students need to know. If I do active learning then I cannot cover essential text material. Further, if we want students to actively participate, they must understand sociological concepts and theories. So, how can we be certain that they read the material and comprehend the material?

In my classes, I make the student responsible for the text material. I use a variety of techniques to assist students in focusing on salient concepts, theories and issues. I always have the student complete the reading assignments prior to the class we will be discussing an issue. This allows me to use a just-in-time teaching technique where I spend time clarifying confusing concepts or theories as identified by the students. If the text assignments demonstrate that most students understand a particular concept, I do not have to talk about the concept in class. I will briefly discuss some of these techniques.

1. *Mini-Quizzes.* If you like using multiple-choice text, create a series of mini-quizzes rather than larger mid-term and final exams. The mini-quizzes should focus on those topics you are ready to discuss.
2. *Chapter Outlines.* If you think there is a lot of material in the textbook that the students must know, have them complete a chapter outline. The outline can be as sparse or detailed as you deem

necessary. When I assign chapter outlines, I look to see if the students have discussed the major headings and included definitions of relevant terms.

3. *Study Questions or Essay Questions from the Test Bank.* Most texts will supply end of the chapter questions, offer a study guide or provide essay question in a test bank. You can have students answer and turn them in the day of the active learning exercise on that topic. You might allow students to keep their papers until after the exercise to assist in the completion of the exercise.
4. *Student Generated Questions.* You can also have students generate and answer their own essay questions. This helps students begin to identify concepts/theories that might be important for a test. If you have a mid-term or final, you can indicate that you will include some student generated questions on the exam.
5. *Personal Experience Journal.* You can ask students to demonstrate how some event (preferably) from their own experience can be understood using the concepts/theories from the course. Here you might want to identify topics/concepts/theories to focus on.
6. *Scrapbooks.* You can have students collect articles (newspaper, magazine, or internet) that illustrate the concepts and theories. They should write a paragraph describing how the article illustrates sociological ideas.
7. *Cooperative Learning Groups.* At the beginning of a topical area, you can ask students to spend the day in cooperative learning group reflecting on salient concepts and theories. This should be a guided reflection. For example, you could ask students to create a conceptual map of the area or ask a critical thinking question that requires the students to synthesize and apply the material on a topical area. I find that students are much more likely to ask for clarification on concepts in a small group setting. You can review the group material and the next meeting day you can ask the groups to report their observations. By reviewing the group work prior to discussing it in class, you can identify interesting discussion points.

Documenting the Classroom Experience

Students need assistance in documenting the learning experience. Often active learning assignments are not as organized as a lecture, making it difficult for students to determine what they should record. There are several methods you can use to help students in organizing classroom experiences.

1. *Post-Discussion Debriefing.* As the exercise is occurring have students jot down questions that occur to them. Stop the activity 5-10 minutes before the class ends. The students can then identify 5-7 points that impressed them most. At home, have the students write a paragraph on each of the major points. At the next class period, have students share their observations.

2. *Guided Outlines.* You can provide students with an outline of ideas that apply to the exercise. This might include specific questions they can answer based on class discussions.
3. *Minute Papers.* This is a common assessment technique that is similar to debriefing. Students write for one minute their observations for the day. You might direct their writing by suggesting what they should include, for example, the most interesting or confusing idea of the day.
4. *Student Generated Test Questions.* You can ask students to write one or two exam questions with answers based on the classroom exercise.
5. *Concept Maps.* This is another technique that is gaining in popularity. You ask students to identify the major concept or theory for the day and map how previous concepts are related to the new concept/theory. You could have your students keep an ongoing map for the entire term and check it periodically.

Student Self-Assessment Techniques

Finally, I think it is important for students to recognize that they can measure their learning in more ways than taking a test and receiving a grade. Self-assessments ask students to monitor their own learning and to make it an explicit part of the learning process. Many of the assessment techniques that have been discussed can help students become more aware of their learning. I think it is always important to bring the ideas of the students into the classroom. One technique I repeatedly return to is the Signs of Serious Thinking paper. The purpose of this paper is to help students become more aware of how the various assignments are tied together. Here are some questions I use:

1. How did you incorporate information from the SocioQuest assignment into the group project assignment? Please be very specific and provide an example.
2. What information did you use from the readings to make the group assignment more sociological in nature?
3. What type of “deep questions” did the portfolio and/or readings provoke?
4. What do you think your group had the most difficulty completing for this assignment? Why was this?
5. What was your most important intellectual contribution to your group project this week? Be very specific.
6. What issue did you find most interesting in your group discussions?
7. Identify one sociological idea from the assignments this week that you would like to share with the rest of the class.
8. Write three questions you would like the class to discuss about sociological issues that have arisen as you have completed the portfolio and group assignments. Do not write questions you have previously submitted!

It is very gratifying to read the student responses to the Signs of Serious Thinking papers. Their engagement and excitement with learning is evident in their responses. I just recently read the first papers for this term and the students appear appreciative to be asked about their thoughts! At the end of the quarter, I always have a comprehensive final paper that requires students to synthesize the material from the class. When students submit these papers I receive comments about how enjoyable the learning experience was and I think they are surprised sometimes at how much they learned.

Learning is truly an interactive process. By engaging our students in their own learning, we are teaching them to become the independent thinkers our society needs!



UPDATE FROM PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOP

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At the annual meeting in New York, the Section continued its commitment to providing opportunities for sociologists to improve their teaching and students' learning. This year's pre-conference for new teachers of sociology was called, “Teachers Are Made, Not Born.” It was organized by Betsy Lucal, Kate Linnenberg and Kerry Strand. A diverse group of experienced teachers of sociology presented a day-long program of sessions on a variety of topics of interest to those folks new to teaching. Thirty-one new teachers attended the conference along with nineteen presenters.

Kathleen McKinney's opening keynote got the day off to a good start. Her presentation reminded us of the importance of listening to student voices as we work to enhance our teaching. Concurrent roundtables presented by Rebecca Bach and Julianne Weinzimmer, Salvador Vidal-Ortiz, Stephen Sweet and Charles Westerberg got participants thinking about “hot topics” in teaching and learning. Presentations on dealing with difficult students, teaching about controversial issues, radical pedagogy and experiential learning provided much food for thought. Ed Kain, Kathleen McKinney and Kathy Rowell comprised a panel of award-winning teachers, giving participants insights into teaching at different kinds of institutions. Agnes Caldwell, Roxanna Harlow, Roger Reitman, and Bob Crutchfield offered roundtable discussions of practical issues in teaching and learning. Participants could choose from: teaching critical thinking, assigning and assessing student work, maximizing student engagement and teaching large classes. After lunch and a repeat of the hot topics sessions, Laura Moore, John Zipp and Susan Farrell discussed getting a job at an institution that values teaching. Then Shannon Davis, Kate Linnenberg and Nate Wright offered their insights into “Surviving the First Year(s) in the Classroom.”

Diane Pike's closing keynote left participants thinking about what it means to be a "sociological teacher." SAGE/Pine Forge provided drinks and snacks and an opportunity for participants to mingle and chat.

By the end of the day, we were all exhausted, but better prepared to begin a new semester or quarter of teaching. Participants' feedback on the conference was overwhelmingly positive and provided excellent advice for future conference organizers.

This year marked the first year Teaching Innovations and Professional Development Awards were offered to participants. Almost 100 people applied for these awards, showing that interest in teaching and learning in sociology remains strong. The awards were funded by an arrangement with SAGE/Pine Forge and Jeanne Ballantine and Keith Roberts. Funds from their book, *Our Social Worlds*, made the awards possible. (Note that if you are a SAGE/Pine Forge author, you can contact them to find out how you can help fund future awards.)

Thanks to my co-organizers and our wonderful presenters, who helped showcase the talents of the members of our wonderful section. Special thanks to Ed Kain and Roxanna Harlow for filling in at the last minute for Greg Weiss. And my best wishes to Greg for a speedy recovery!

USING TECHNOLOGY AND FILM TO TEACH SOCIOLOGY

Editor is currently seeking articles on using technology for teaching and learning sociology for future editions

Susan L Wortmann

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Girl Trouble showcases four years of relevant scenes in the lives of three teenage girls in trouble in San Francisco's juvenile justice system—Shangra, Stephanie, and Sheila. While all have entered the system on different charges (Shangra, at age 16 for drug possession, Stephanie, at age 13 for trespassing, and Sheila, at age 14 for running away from home) all share similar backgrounds of poverty, family violence and family substance abuse, homelessness, and their own drug use. They also share a history of work at the Center for Young Women's Development (CYWD) and a relationship with its Director Lateefah Simon, herself a young woman with a similar past. The power of the peer-run Center and Simon's remarkable dedication and empathy for the girls is an important subtext of this documentary, as are the interventions of other alternatively caring, understanding, and tough adult gatekeepers who are committed to the girls' rehabilitation in an overcrowded, failing juvenile justice system that provides few resources for girls.

The documentary begins at a moment when each girl is facing serious legal and personal issues. For instance, Shangra has recently been charged with possession for sale of crack cocaine and simple possession of crack cocaine. She learns she is likely headed for jail, a fate she views with both trepidation and curiosity. "I've always wondered what jail is like," she tells her sister as both await a discussion

with her caseworker. Stephanie, on the other hand, has an outstanding warrant because she has run away from a group home. Described as impulsive, defiant, and violent, she has just given birth to Herbert, the son of her boyfriend, Herbert. Stephanie loves Herbert, but is often the target of his physical and psychological abuse. It is unclear how Stephanie will negotiate the new baby, Herbert's abuse, their lack of shelter, and looming legal issues. Sheila is in an equally tenuous spot. She has just been fired from the CYWD, the only place that she reports she feels safe. She has been accused of selling drugs and this accusation puts her, the Center, and the girls within it at risk. Furthermore, she is soon to be homeless—her abusive father, anticipating an upcoming release from jail, has already told her that when he returns she must move out. The girls deal with these and other challenges throughout the film.

Personal narrative, varied filming locations, and longitudinal portraits provide a compelling insider view of the girls and their experiences. As viewers, we are privy to the girls' backgrounds, their frustrations and hopes, and the good and bad decisions they make over time. We are also left with an understanding of how their decisions receive magnified scrutiny because of their position in the juvenile justice system. Leban and Szajko provide an excellent mix of the intimate and public sociological backdrops of their lives, blending shots of personal interactions, homes, jobs (including the Center), the streets, their neighborhoods, the detention centers, and the programs to which they are mandated. The snippets of interactions with CYWD directors and employees, social service workers, lawyers, and judges illustrate that workers in the system can work together to produce positive outcomes. For instance, instead of sentencing Sheila to prison for shooting her brother when she was high, the prosecution and defense work together to find Sheila to a suitable rehabilitation program. Viewers come to see that these are not unredeemable bad girls, nor are they merely victims, but instead they are multidimensional young women whose lives and choices defy and sometimes uphold stereotypes.

Ironically, several of *Girl Troubles'* strengths are also its weaknesses. The focus on the girls and their stories detracts from one of Leban and Szajko's stated goals: to illustrate the problems that girls face in an underfunded juvenile justice system. That is, while viewers leave with a clear understanding of each girl's story, just *how* the girls' problems are associated with or exacerbated by underfunding is unclear. In fact, on the surface, with the help they have received during the four years, the girls seem to have negotiated the system to a potentially promising future, albeit with looming challenges. Shangra has graduated from high school at Walden House and is a peer mentor at CYDC; Stephanie is a sophomore in City College with a 3.25 GPA; Sheila appears to be benefiting from her continued time in Walden House and has entered a building trades program. These positive endings may have the unintended effect of leaving novice viewers with a misplaced optimism about the outcomes of juvenile justice. The filmmaker's ending statistics do little to clarify typical outcomes that might show us how unique or typical these girls. Post-video discussion, therefore, is crucial. It should

include statistics and studies that illustrate an overview of the macro realities of gendered and raced juvenile justice: policy, recidivism, overloaded case workers, etc. *Girl Trouble* might be used as a springboard to develop further insights around practices that influence positive outcomes in the juvenile justice system. Instructors might also want to encourage students to think about the potential impact of the filmmakers' presence on the girls' experiences and outcomes.

With clarifying statistics and class discussion, *Girl Trouble* is appropriate for both high school and college sociology courses that explore topics of gender, class, race, family, violence, crime, and drug usage. Viewing and discussion could also occur outside of traditional classrooms. For instance, interns in social service, criminal justice, and public policy should find many common denominators with their experiences. With guided discussion, they may develop important insights into the work they are doing. Finally, sociology clubs/organizations might co-sponsor this film with criminal justice, psychology, and social work clubs/organizations to engage in fruitful cross-disciplinary discussion.

The film has three additional features that make it attractive for classroom adoption. First, its two time formats offer flexibility in classroom viewing. Second, the video is accompanied by a downloadable twenty four page *Discussion Guide for Youth Audiences* that includes filmmakers' statements, goals and background on their project; information on the CYWD; discussion topics, worksheets; and resources. Third, instructors and their students can also explore the interactive companion website www.girltrouble.org for statistics on the gender and ethnic bias in the juvenile justice system, and resources and links to agencies, programs, and other information. Additionally, a blog located on the site provides an interesting range of viewer responses from girls in similar trouble, to caseworkers, and to those who were inspired by the film.

Filmmakers Leban and Szajko in the *Discussion Guide for Youth Audiences* reveal that their original intent was to follow six girls in trouble for a shorter period of time. Importantly, with the agreement of Shangra, Stephanie, and Sheila, they instead recorded their three stories over an often-chaotic and difficult four years. At the end, they edited over 700 hours of film into the final one hour plus DVD production. The girls allowed this ongoing intrusion in their lives because they hoped, "that the film could make a difference for other young women in similar situations." If one of our many goals in the classroom is to stimulate empathetic understanding and critical thinking, then this film informed by discussion might also help to create a difference for those who will also ultimately be responsible for justice for such girls.

Girl Trouble: Girls Tell Their Truth About the Juvenile Justice System. 74 minutes (theatrical version) and 57 minutes (PBS version). 2004. Produced and Directed by Lexi Leban and Lidia Szajko. New Day Films. P.O. Box 1084, Harriman, NY 10926. www.girltrouble.org Rental \$75 and purchase \$275.

REFLECTIONS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Next issue will feature our section award winner, Maxine Atkinson.

ADVICE TO NEW TEACHERS AND ADVICE TO SEASONED TEACHERS

Edward L. Kain

2007 ASA Distinguished Contributions to Teaching Award Winner

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When Kathy Rowell asked me to reflect upon what advice I would give both new and seasoned teachers, I divided that task into two parts. First, I asked "what are the principles that guide me as I think about my own teaching in sociology?" Second I turned to the question "which of these apply more to new teachers, and which are more appropriate to those of us who have taught sociology for many years?" I firmly believe that we can all continue to strengthen the interrelated processes of teaching and learning throughout our careers, thus on many levels I'd say that all of my reflections are useful ideas to think about whether you are entering the classroom for the first time, or you are well into your career as a teacher of sociology. Nonetheless, I took her instructions to heart, and have chosen to write about six pieces of advice: two for everyone, two for new teachers, and two for more seasoned instructors.

I tried to be brief here. In other places I have expanded upon these comments in much more detail (see, for example "Five Strategies for Successful Teaching and Learning in Sociology", pp. 145-155 in Marilyn C. Krogh (ed), *Preparing Graduate Students to Teach*, 5th ed., American Sociological Association Teaching Resources Center, 2006)

Two important pieces of advice for everyone who teaches sociology

My first, and most important bit of advice to anyone teaching sociology is ***build your pedagogical strategies around learning goals/student learning outcomes.*** The past two decades have seen a shift in paradigm from a focus upon teaching to a focus upon learning. At the broadest level you should ask "What do you want your students to

have at the end of the major that they did not have at the beginning?" This applies, however, to every unit—the semester, the course, the class session, the assignment, the two-minute exercise/example in a class. As you are thinking about student learning outcomes, plan for how you might assess how effectively they have been achieved. The ASA has an excellent publication on this topic (Lowry *et al.* 2005). You can download and print this at:

<http://www.asanet.org/galleries/APAP/Assessment%20Final%20Copy%202005.pdf>

When thinking about your goals for a course, place them within a broader framework of goals for the teaching of sociology. In 1990 the ASA endorsed a set of national guidelines for the major. These were updated and expanded in a 2004 report (McKinney, *et al.*, 2004) entitled *Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major Updated: Meeting the Challenge of Teaching Sociology in the Twenty-First Century*.

Become familiar with the recommendations in this report. Overall, it can be a helpful guide for thinking about course goals, pedagogy, and curriculum. Talk with your colleagues about the curriculum in your department and the goals for your students in courses at different levels in the curriculum. Have discussions about how your department curriculum relates to curricular recommendations in *Liberal Learning*. If you are in a setting that does not have a major, reflect upon what you can find useful in *Liberal Learning*. You can download and print a free copy from the ASA website, at the following address:

http://www.asanet.org/galleries/default-file/Lib_Learning_FINAL.pdf

Two useful strategies for new sociology teachers

Expand your pedagogical strategies by using material from a network of colleagues. We can always learn from others. There are many resources that can link you to a broader network of teacher/scholars in your teaching areas. Among the most useful are: 1) *Teaching Sociology*, 2) publications from the ASA Teaching Resources Center which can be found at the ASA website, including syllabi collections and publications on curriculum development and department leadership, 3) workshops at the ASA and regional meetings, and 4) membership in the Section on Teaching and Learning in Sociology.

Remember that time improves everything. All of us make mistakes in the classroom and assign projects or activities that don't work out. Don't become discouraged. We also discover things that work brilliantly to enhance our students' learning. Refine your teaching based upon what works and what doesn't work.

Two useful strategies for seasoned teachers of sociology

One of the most effective ways to excite your students is to teach them about sociological skills and concepts in creative ways. Data and "facts" will change over time, but the usefulness of applying sociological skills and concepts will remain. I've been teaching since the late 1970's. I find that the examples I use and the methods I employ to add excitement to the classroom have had to change over time to

remain relevant and interesting to students of different cohorts. The journal *Teaching Sociology*, and publications found at the ASA website can provide you with a number of excellent ideas for teaching and learning in sociology.

Use your students to help diversify the types of things that you do in the classroom. I always try to employ a variety of methods in my teaching. Over time (as I age!) I have found it more and more difficult to multi-task in the classroom. I have found it useful to use student volunteers to help me in this process. Students who are very adept at using the web can use the computer projection system in the room to illustrate data from the U.S. Census Bureau website, or use SPSS to analyze the relationship between two variables in the NORC-GSS dataset. With them physically at the machine(s), I often find that I can move more seamlessly through leading discussions and bringing in illustrations using data from the web and from sociological datasets. I still walk the students through using SPSS, or searching through a website—their aptitude at navigating the hardware and software combines with my background to help us all learn together.

As I read through what I've written here, I conclude where I began—all of these comments apply to all of us, no matter where we are in our academic life course. I look forward to hearing from you about your advice to teachers of sociology.

REFLECTIONS ON TEACHING SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS

"Teaching the Sociological Imagination Paradigm"

David R. Simon, Postdoctoral Fellow
University of North Florida

C. Wright Mills (1956, 1961, Horowitz (Ed.), 1963) left a seminal legacy to sociology in particular (1959). His sociological imagination paradigm is mentioned in virtually every introductory sociology text. However, as an examination of a sample of these texts demonstrates most authors (1) mention the paradigm in only the first chapter of their books and never mention it again in remaining chapters; (2) mention that Mills encouraged recognition of the link between private troubles and public issues, and are content to not to take seriously other aspects of the paradigm. We find this situation tragic because the sociological imagination is every bit as much a paradigm as functionalism, interactionism, social constructionism, feminism, postmodernism, or Marxism.

The paradigm can also be used to analyze other historical eras (Simon, 1995; 1997; 2008). The basic elements of the sociological imagination (Simon, 1995) include the following concepts:

1. *Personal troubles-troubles* that "occur within the character of the individual and within the range of ... immediate relations with others; they have to do with [the] self and with those limited areas of social life of which [one] is directly and personally aware" (Mills, 1959:8). Perceptions of and solutions to personal troubles lie within one's immediate environment, one's family, workplace,

school, religious organization, or neighborhood. Thus, if two college roommates quarrel and decide they no longer wish to room together, each can resolve the problem by finding a more compatible partner, and most college campuses have a place to post “seeking roommate” notices. Thus the problem is resolvable within the immediate environment of the college campus. Social problems, on the other hand, are of a dramatically different nature.

2. *Public issues (social problems)-issues* that transcend the local environments of work, family, and community. Social problems involve a genuine crisis in institutional arrangements. Crises are genuine only when they demand that choices be made about situations that confront a society. Troubles become issues when they become widespread.

Consider unemployment. If, in a society of over 100 million workers, the only people who are unemployed are those who refuse to work, that is a personal trouble. The cause is within the characters of individuals who are either mentally incapacitated or morally wanting. If, however, that society suffers massive layoffs as businesses “downsize” and move factories overseas in search of cheap labor and other financial advantages, sociological forces are clearly at work. No amount of counseling or punishment of errant workers will resolve a crisis of permanent recession.

Mills believed that many social problems indicate a “crisis in institutional arrangements” (Mills, 1959:9). Such crises involve what sociologists term macro social problems.

Social problems are *objectively* harmful conditions. In other words, the harms involved can be measured or counted as deaths or injuries, financial losses, and decline of trust in major institutions and the elites who head them (Simon, 1995).

If harms are suffered at high rates with regularity by groups of people with certain characteristics and in specific historical circumstances, they may be said to be socially patterned. If harms are socially patterned, they must, it follows, be caused by social conditions. The recognition of such conditions is a key element of the sociological imagination.

A basic assumption of the sociological imagination is that much human

history is about the conflict between the few who have control over scarce resources and the many who do not. These resources include wealth (property), *income* (wages and salaries), *power* (the ability to make economic and political decisions that affect the entire society), and *cultural values* (standards of right and wrong, beautiful and ugly).

3. *Social Structure*: What is the particular structure of the entire society and what are its essential component parts? How do the parts relate to one another? How does this society differ from others?

4. *The Historical Era’s Main Drift*: Where does the society stand in history’s it on the ascendant or in decline? How does social change happen? What are the essential features of the historical epoch? How is history made? What master trends the current era does (main drift) will soon cause contradictions and social problems?

5. *Biography (social character)* Mills believed it is important to answer the following questions about social character:

- What kinds of men and women characterize the society? What kinds of ‘human nature’ are evolving? In what ways are social characteristics shaped? Which characteristics are encouraged and which are repressed? What types of ‘human nature’ are revealed in the character we observe in the society in this period?
- How is human nature shaped by the society’s dominant institutions?

For Mills a feature of social character that must be addressed is *alienation*. What are the institutional conditions responsible for feelings of alienation and low self-esteem in individuals?

How are these alienating conditions within institutions related to various social problems?

What can be done to overcome alienating conditions and the feelings they engender in individuals?

Mills also believed that no sociological understanding of social character is complete without an analysis of alienation (Mills, 1959:171). He believed that people confused about (mystified by) the causes of their alienation due to the modern techniques of propaganda, advertising, and manipulation.

Mills’ questions concerning structure, history, biography, and alienation provide a road map with which sociological inquiry can be undertaken.

THE ROAD AHEAD: ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS POSED BY THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

My purpose here is to let sociologists know that the sociological imagination involves questions about structure and historical drift, social character and alienation. Second, the answers to the questions posed by the sociological imagination are not eternal. Social structures, historical drift, and social character vary with the society and period of history under study. The America of the 2010s is not the America of the 1710s. The America of the 2210s will not be the America of the 2010s. The questions that make up the sociological imagination are constant, but the answers are always evolving.

As professors of sociology, there are two great challenges in teaching the sociological imagination paradigm. What are some useful ways to explain central concepts like social structure, main drift, social character, and alienation? Second, what are some pedagogical tools that are of use in explaining the answers to these questions concerning the contemporary United States, as well as other societies in the postmodern era?

Editor’s Note: One of my purposes in including this article is to challenge section members to respond – How do you teach the sociological imagination? Do you think it is important to include? Do you teach social problems? What if your department offers both intro and social problems; how do you use sociological imagination in these courses? What about other courses?

SECTION NEWS AND NOTES

Check out the new book by member Michael DeCesare of Merrimack College entitled [A Discipline Divided: Sociology in American High Schools](#) (Lexington Books, 2007)

Section on Teaching and Learning Call for Roundtable Proposals

We are accepting proposals for the section-sponsored roundtable session to be held at the Annual Meetings of the American Sociological Association in Boston in July-August 2008. Please submit a concise title (one that clearly captures the intended content of your proposed table), along with the name(s) of table organizer(s) and her/his/their institutional affiliation, contact information (email, telephone, surface mail) to the roundtable organizers: Tanya Gladney and Meg Wilkes Karraker at MWKarraker@StThomas.edu

The John F. Schnabel Distinguished Contributions to Teaching Award 2008 Call for Nominations

The North Central Sociological Association Teaching Committee is calling for nominations (and re-nominations) for the 2008 *The John F. Schnabel Distinguished Contributions to Teaching Award*. This award may be given to an individual, a department, a program, or an institution. Individuals nominated for the award must be a member of the NCSA. Departments, programs, or institutions nominated for the award must be located in the NCSA region. The principal criterion for the award is excellence in some activity enhancing the teaching of Sociology for the NCSA or within the North Central region. As such, the "criteria" are intentionally flexible in order to accommodate the innovative and creative.

A partial list of the kinds of activities that would be considered includes:

1. The sharing of pioneering innovations in curriculum design. Creative classroom activities, and/or development of instructional methods.
2. The development of especially creative instructional materials.
3. A distinguished record of publication and/or research on or about the teaching of Sociology.
4. A distinguished record of assuring a teaching emphasis at the NCSA by organizing research session on teaching, creating displays, chairing panels, conducting teaching workshops, and/or chairing roundtables on some teaching emphasis.
5. Faculty developmental efforts such as systematic in-service training of teachers or a distinguished record of preparing graduate students to teach.

When making nominations for the award, nominators are asked to send as much of the following as possible:

1. A letter of nomination outlining reasons for the nomination.

2. A vita and/or a listing of activities which have fostered better teaching of Sociology.

3. Documents supporting the nomination.

The more concrete and specific the information and documentation, the stronger the nomination will be. Nominators may want to notify the person the person being nominated and ask him or her to send appropriate supporting materials. Anyone who has been a nominator before is strongly encouraged to re-nominate that individual, department, program, or institution. The deadline for nominations is January 31, 2008.

Send nominations or address questions to:
katherine.rowell@sinclair.edu

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

Please submit suggestions for the Winter newsletter to Kathy Rowell. 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. Editor is specifically looking for articles that include or are scholarly in nature. **Deadline is February 1, 2007.**

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.

For the most up to date information about the Teaching and Learning Section in Sociology, please check the following websites:

American Sociological Association Meeting website:

<http://www.asanet.org/cs/root/leftnav/meetings/2008>

ASA Teaching and Learning in Sociology website:

<http://www2.asanet.org/sectionteach/>

Worlds of Work

August 1-4, 2008

Sheraton Boston and the
Boston Marriott Copley Place
Boston, MA

The 2008 ASA program will focus on the interconnections between work—broadly conceived—and society. Work is one of the most basic of social activities and institutions and has far-reaching correlates and consequences. The title—Worlds of Work—points to two main sub-themes. First, it underscores the increasing diversity by which work is organized and experienced in societies. Work activities can: take place formally in organizations or informally between individuals; be labeled as illegal or legal; be unpaid, well-paid, or poorly paid; and

involve considerable security for some or be unstable for others. People may also regard their work activities as more or less important to them at various stages of their lives. Second, the program title emphasizes the cross-national and historical diversity in work activities, work-related institutions, and the experience of work. Outsourcing of production, global human rights, immigration, and cultural differences all provide fertile ground for a comparative understanding of the many varieties of work.

The 2008 program will emphasize social change and the dynamic connections between changing patterns of work and social life. We will highlight how social, economic, and political forces are transforming the nature of work in society as well as the consequences—both intended and unintended—for social institutions and individuals. For example, we hope to learn how changing worlds of work affect and are affected by: social stratification and racial, ethnic, age, and gender inequality; immigration; migration; geographic mobility; crime; and the cultural meanings of work. We will assess the ramifications of these changes in work for diverse institutions such as families, schools, state policy, and communities. We will also consider how changes in work influence outcomes for individuals (e.g., mental health, identity, problems of caring, experience in low-wage and often “dead end” jobs, and coping with job insecurity and unemployment).

This wide-ranging focus on work and society is grounded in both classical and contemporary sociological concerns and draws upon many of our discipline's theories and research traditions. Accordingly, the 2008 program theme embraces diverse sociological approaches, including political economy perspectives, organizational and occupational sociology, social psychology, and cultural and ethnographic studies. It also draws upon relevant insights from disciplines such as economics, psychology, history, and geography. The 2008 program especially seeks to demonstrate the relevance of social science research for public policy and for efforts to address social inequities and inequalities through activism around work-related issues—such as transnational labor movements, union-based movements, and community organizing. The program thereby attempts to contribute to the debates that are likely to surface in the 2008 U.S. presidential election and to promote the continuing emphasis on public sociology.

Arne L. Kalleberg, President-Elect, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill