



Teaching Portfolio

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Teaching Philosophy

“If your brain hurts, you’re doing it right,” I tell my students as I encourage them to engage in the process of sociological inquiry. Students in my classes *do* sociology; they don’t just memorize it. My goal is that they think like sociologists as often and as deeply as possible, and I create ways to make that happen.

THE CRAFT OF TEACHING

The old saying “Those who can, do. Those who can’t, teach” to me, is an affront to the craft of teaching.

The saying implies that teaching requires no skill, no action. On the contrary, becoming a good teacher is a process just like becoming a good painter, a good furniture maker, or a good social analyst. Like other crafts, teaching is something that takes time and devotion toward growth and expertise. I believe that the craft of teaching requires a combination of passion, knowledge, patience, confidence, quick wit, and a willingness to make mistakes. Sometimes the best lessons and ideas grow out of the failed attempts of others. Like the chef who fiddles with her recipe until it’s just right, I fiddle with my recipes for teaching about the social world. Although I’m no chef, I do teach like I cook. What I mean is this:

Some menu items become faithful standbys. Spaghetti, for example, requires basic ingredients that are inexpensive and the meal is quick and easy to make. But the meal is both filling and delicious. It always works and it’s easy. My pedagogical spaghetti, if you will, includes some basic exercises that are intellectually satisfying and sociologically

Good teaching requires some experimentation; it is an important part of the craft of teaching because a willingness to fail is also a willingness to succeed.

engaging, no matter how many times I dish them up. If my goal is to fill bellies and minds, these standbys work dependably.

But it’s not always spaghetti. There are staple ingredients I keep in my pedagogical pantry that I always have around and use, but I find different things to do with them. A cook can try a lot of different things with rice, noodles, beans, and tomatoes, for example. And the experimentation sometimes leads to delicious inventions. Good teaching requires some experimentation; it is an important part of the craft of teaching because a willingness to fail is also a willingness to succeed.

Students in my classes *do* sociology.

A key way I determine if something works or not is through reflections on teaching. Sometimes I write them, sometimes I verbalize my reflections to a gracious colleague who lends an ear, and sometimes I just think about it. These reflections are important to my development as an excellent teacher; I use these reflections not only to examine how something went over in class in general, but also how I can improve an exercise, paired readings, handling students' comments, lecture notes, or discussion questions.

I know how to teach well because I have studied how to be an excellent teacher alongside studying how to be a sociologist. Because of my training in pedagogy and my intense devotion to high quality teaching, I believe that I can teach almost any undergraduate course – even if I am not an expert in that field - because I have cultivated a good teaching practice. A furniture maker whose specialty is chairs, for instance, can most certainly build a table because the skills and tools of the craft are similar. Because I take the craft of teaching so seriously, I have built a strong foundation in both the discipline and expertise in teaching.

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I believe that learning can be transformative in ways that can enhance students' lives and the lives of others in obvious and complex ways. Critical pedagogy informs my overall approach to and belief in the power of education. Most importantly, I believe that education is at its best when it creates sustained learning, intellectual growth, and the discovery of the utility of knowledge. I agree with Ken Bain¹ (2004), who wrote: "*the best teachers assume that learning has little meaning unless it produces a sustained and substantial influence on the way people think, act, and feel*" (p. 17). Learning sociology is a unique practice because it requires meaningful *conversation* about the course material. I encourage my students to continue these conversations with whoever will engage them. It is my hope that these conversations will help students see the world through a sociological lens and ultimately find ways to work for the betterment of society.

¹ Bain, Ken. 2004. *What the Best College Teachers Do*. Harvard University Press.

Pedagogical Approaches

I try to get my students to *do* something every class period. When students are actively engaged in exploring, applying, or debating the material, they will learn more than if I expect them to ingest the content passively. I practice Inquiry-Guided Learning² (IGL) which involves stimulating critical thinking skills and sociological investigation through inquiry.

**Questions are like shovels;
they are tools to dig deeper.**

Typically, students' relationship to questions involves one correct answer to the teacher's question. In an inquiry-guided classroom, I encourage students to focus on *asking* questions, especially questions for which answers are not immediately available.

This frustrates students at first. But in a short time, most students become proficient in sociological inquiry and often find that their questions lead to more questions. I tell my students that questions are like shovels; they are tools to dig deeper. And sometimes, one scoop just isn't enough.



² See Atkinson, Maxine and Andrea N. Hunt. 2008. Inquiry-Guided Learning in Sociology. *Teaching Sociology*, 36(1):1-7.



Active Learning

In addition to IGL, I practice active learning, which is always intellectually active, but also sometimes physically active. I believe that active learning is essential learning. It makes it stick. If students get to work asking sociological questions and examining the social world, instead of me telling them about it, they will learn more. I regularly “off-load the content” so students can more actively and deeply engage the material.

I strive to make sociology accessible and relevant to students and I encourage them to apply sociological material to their surroundings and experiences. I think it is important that students do the majority of the thinking and wrestling with the content, learning to minimize their reliance on me. By engaging students in active learning, I teach them how to think sociologically about the social worlds they inhabit. Next I describe a few in-class exercises I use to achieve this type of sociological engagement.

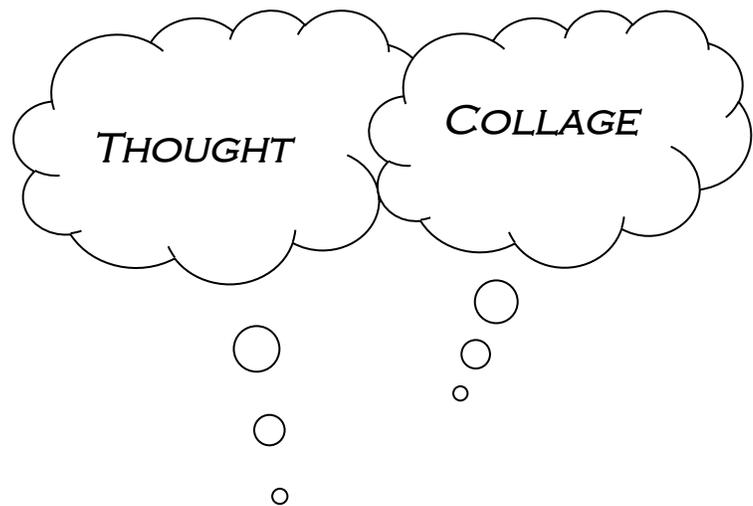
I tell my students that we must maintain a balance between fun and learning.

In-Class Exercises for Active, Inquiry-Based Learning

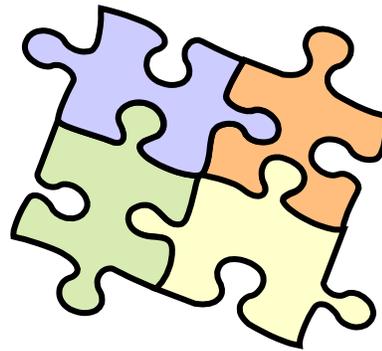


I have a canister that I call my “**Sociological Fun Jar**” and I often fill it with slips of paper on which I write discussion questions, sociological problems to work on, or sections from the reading that need some untangling, discussion, and/or application. Sometimes I ask them to put questions or comments in the jar. It’s amazing how the canister adds mystery and excitement to what I could otherwise write on the board and lecture about. I can usually feel the energy in the room heat up as they pass the canister around.

A **Thought Collage** is a simple exercise that asks students to dig through their book, articles, or notes to find something to write on the board: a quote; a discussion point; a question (for clarification or inquiry). Then, with me facilitating and contributing my expertise when needed, the students lead the discussion based on what they wrote on the board. This is a simple and effective way to get through a lot of course material. It also functions as a way for students to determine what is important and what needs further discussion. In essence, students typically write the same information that I would put in lecture notes, but their creation of and participation in this process keeps them engaged, focused, and invested.



Jigsaw



This strategy is used at all levels of education and in a multitude of ways.³ It is based on the idea that students can become experts on something and then teach that something to others. At least once a semester, I assign half the class to read one article (e.g., Anderson’s “Code of the Street” and the other half another one (e.g., Chambliss’s “Saints and Roughnecks”). In class, the students will work collectively with their “expert team” to identify important concepts, processes, and questions in the article. Then, they will teach this to the other group. Depending on the class size, this is done as a whole class, in groups, or in pairs. Students do exceptionally well at this; knowing that they will have to teach this to a peer changes and heightens their level of engagement as they develop expertise. This exercise also highlights the importance of learning from each other and acknowledging that we are all teacher-learners.

**We are all
teacher-learners.**

Students are, at first, uneasy about these practices and they sometimes feel that I am not teaching them because I am not standing at the front of the class talking. I talk to my students about teaching and explain my reasoning for using various forms of active learning. Eventually they take comfort in the fact that they know I have a purpose and they just get to work as my sociological apprentices. They don’t just learn *about* sociology, they *do* sociology. And they excel at it.

³ See Hedeem, Timothy. 2003. “The Reverse Jigsaw: A Process of Cooperative Learning and Discussion.” *Teaching Sociology*, 31(3): 325-332) for a brief review.

Teaching Goals

I will continue to:

- ❖ Read scholarship on teaching and learning including both non-disciplinary and sociological resources
- ❖ Publish papers in the scholarship of teaching and learning
- ❖ Update my skills on using technology in the classroom
- ❖ Attend workshops on teaching related items whenever possible
- ❖ Update course activities and selected readings to avoid what I call “yellow note syndrome”
- ❖ Stay abreast of sociological research and incorporate it into my courses
- ❖ Learn from students to improve my teaching

Turning Weaknesses into Teaching Goals

We all have weaknesses and blind spots. Fortunately, I am pretty good at acknowledging mine and working to improve them. For this, I value students' feedback and evaluations – both formal and informal. One time I had fallen into an uncharacteristic habit of using PowerPoint to lecture. As I normally do, I gave my students an informal course evaluation about halfway through the term. The near unanimous comment was one I've never gotten before. They said I was boring. “Boring?” I asked them during the post-evaluation discussion. They assured me it was true. And they begged me to abandon the PowerPoint and make them “do some group activities or something.” I didn't use PowerPoint again. And I'm glad. Although it is a valuable technology for certain things, it does not fit my general teaching style. Because students were willing to admit this to me, and I was willing to learn from my mistakes, I have become more conscious about the ways I deliver material as well as how students are responding to those delivery methods. Although I didn't like to be called boring, I am a better teacher because of this.

In my career I would like to:

- ❖ Improve my knowledge of different learning styles and my attempts to provide learning opportunities for all learners
- ❖ Develop or participate in interdisciplinary programming for first-year students
- ❖ Prepare and teach standard courses such as:
 - race and ethnic relations; racial inequality
 - women and men in society; gender inequality
 - stratification and social mobility
 - collective behavior and social movements
 - sociological theory
 - urban sociology
 - popular culture and media
 - political sociology
 - qualitative methods and/or research design and data collection
- ❖ Develop and teach courses such as:
 - sociology through autobiography
 - social psychology of social movements
 - social psychology of inequality
 - intersectional privilege and oppression
- ❖ Engage students in both collaborative and independent research
- ❖ Mentor students who want to attend graduate school
- ❖ Work as a bridge between the college/university and the community by participating in and supporting student-led civic engagement projects
- ❖ Design, attend, and facilitate an alternative spring break travel seminar

Evaluations of Teaching

FALL 2008-SPRING 2011 (QUANTITATIVE)

*1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree	Spring 2011	Fall 2010	Spring 2010	Fall 2009	Spring 2009	Fall 2008
Questions	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
The instructor stated course objectives/outcomes	4.9	4.8	4.6	4.5	4.8	4.7
The instructor was receptive to students outside the classroom	4.8	4.8	4.5	4.6	4.8	4.8
The instructor explained difficult material well	4.8	4.8	4.5	4.4	4.6	4.7
The instructor was enthusiastic about teaching the course	4.9	4.9	4.7	4.8	4.9	4.9
The instructor was prepared for class	4.8	4.8	4.6	4.6	4.9	4.8
The instructor gave prompt and useful feedback	4.8	4.8	4.5	4.7	4.9	4.5
The instructor effectively used instructional technology	4.8	4.8	4.6	4.5	4.5	4.7
The instructor consistently treated students with respect	4.9	4.8	4.7	4.4	4.6	4.9
Overall, the instructor was an effective teacher	4.9	4.9	4.8	4.5	4.6	4.9
The course readings were valuable aids to learning	4.8	4.6	4.8	4.5	4.9	4.9
The course assignments were valuable aids to learning	4.7	4.7	4.7	4.5	4.8	4.7
This course was intellectually challenging and stimulating	4.8	4.8	4.8	4.5	4.9	4.9
This course improved my knowledge of the subject	4.8	4.8	4.8	4.5	4.8	4.9
Overall, this course was excellent	4.8	4.8	4.7	4.4	4.6	4.7

In addition to the quantitative evaluations above, I have compiled and examined the qualitative portion of teaching evaluations for 5 years' worth of teaching at NC State. For the sake of brevity, I selected students' comments that represent patterns in the various strengths I have as a teacher. After each pattern, I provide a brief reflection.

Courses evaluated: Two semesters of Human Behavior (Social Psychology); Seven semesters of Principles of Sociology (most sections of which from First Year Inquiry Program with 20-22 students).

TEACHING EVALUATIONS (QUALITATIVE), 2007-2011

ENTHUSIASTIC TEACHING STYLE

I have never had a teacher as enthusiastic as Ms. Rusche. I always look forward to coming to class because she makes the learning environment fun, interesting, and always different. Each activity we do relates to the topics we prepared for class and it allows us to retain the material in unforgettable ways. I thoroughly enjoyed this class because of Ms. Rusche.

She was really excited about sociology, which made everyone else excited as well.

She is my favorite instructor that I have ever had. She is totally awesome and an amazing teacher.

Professor Rusche was an excellent professor. She is very funny and entertaining while also teaching some difficult subject matter. The entire class is able to participate with each discussion and her encouragement is very helpful. I can't think of any real weaknesses.

She made learning fun and memorable. I love how she teaches

Reflection: *My students are right.*

I love sociology and it shows. *I also believe that students learn more when they are given permission to have a little fun, and when they are actively involved in creating and maintaining the learning environment. My students are actively doing something every day. I think they appreciate that I value their contributions and that I genuinely want to see them learn and succeed.*

VALUES STUDENT ENGAGEMENT; ENCOURAGES DEEP LEARNING

Absolutely love Ms. Rusche and wish she taught more classes here at State. I could not wait to get to class and hear what she would be teaching us, and she gave us plenty of opportunities to jump right into the conversation and always answered a risen [sic] hand. She treated all students with respect which was important because we were working with very controversial subjects in the class. She was also very funny and hyper which made the lessons much more interesting! I like how she incorporated group work into the course and small skits that we would have to put together. She also knew everyone's name which definitely makes you appreciate the teacher more and makes you want to pay attention. Overall, the most effective teacher I have had here at State. She basically gave me a new outlook on society and on life!

Overall, the most effective teacher I have had here at State.

Ms. Rusche was very receptive and kind to the students. She was available outside of class, and explained the material really well.

What a good work-out at the gym does for the body, a good work-out in class does for the mind.

The instructor has a gift for making students understand the principles of sociology. She is very respectful and encourages students to think for themselves.

Reflection: *When students are actively engaged in the course, encouraged to contribute to the learning community, and have those contributions valued, I believe that they are better equipped to take on greater*

intellectual challenges. My students work very hard in my courses and work through intellectual challenges regularly. What a good work-out at the gym does for the body, a good work-out in class does for the mind. Students twist their minds and wrestle with issues, and then they thank me for it. I treasure this gratitude.

INTELLECTUALLY CHALLENGING, YET REWARDING

The instructor was simply amazing. She always challenged us. I learned so much more than I ever expected from her. Her knowledge on the subject itself was simply impressive as well.

Explained very complicated material in a way that everyone understood. Very reasonable with grading and wants everyone to succeed. Truly cares about her profession and students.

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Course was very stimulating; a lot of the subjects we talked about were very interesting and all tied together making it much easier to understand. Also, not a lot of vocabulary to memorize, but instead concepts to understand, which I like a lot better.

Hard assignments. A lot of work, but made the material stick!!!

She gave us material that we could relate to. She influenced us to really push ourselves.

Reflection: *I appreciate students' acknowledgement of the intellectually challenging nature of my courses. Sometimes course evaluations can reflect the popularity or personality of a teacher rather than the teacher's effectiveness or*

[I am] confident that my students walk away with marked intellectual growth

intellectual rigor. I consistently get good evaluations from students, but I always wondered, 'are they really learning a lot or do they just like me?' Of course, it's nice to be well-liked, but not if this is the only basis for their enjoyment and praise for the course. Once I

began to pay closer attention to this concern in my teaching and in my evaluations, I felt confident that my students were walking away with marked intellectual growth, not just memories of a good time in a fun class.

SELF-REPORTED EVIDENCE OF SUSTAINED LEARNING

She never forced anyone to give their opinion, but welcomed them openly. I felt I learned a lot because she is so engaged in her teaching.

Ms. Rusche is an excellent instructor! I learned so much from this course that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. I feel like it was very eye-opening and

It is probably the most I have learned in a class in my college career.

I will be able to actually use the lessons I learned from Ms. Rusche in my everyday life. I actually think differently now! Thank you!

Hands down one of the best professors I have ever had at North Carolina State University. I have never felt like I wanted to participate in class until being in Professor Rusche's class. She made it so interesting and borderline fun to be learning about Human Behavior.

Not the biggest fan of sociology and when signing up for a 300-level course I figured I was doomed, turns out I really enjoyed the class and learned more than I ever expected. I honestly believe it was because of the professor!

The course provided a great environment for me to nurture my sociological curiosity

Prior to this course, I had not had any exposure to sociology. I entered the class with minimal knowledge and left a sociologically sophisticated thinker.

***Reflection:** My courses are intellectually stimulating and challenging, and typically involve a lot of low-stakes writing. At first, students will complain about the “workload” but after some encouragement and feedback from me, they begin to see the great benefits of writing regularly as a part of their intellectual and sociological practice. Although most students enjoy my teaching style and course content, I am not perfect. However, I value the weaknesses that students point out because these help me see what needs improvement.*

PEER EVALUATIONS OF TEACHING

Professor Maxine Atkinson, Department Head and teaching mentor, mentored me as I developed into the teacher-scholar I am today. The brief statement she offered after an observation in my classroom reflects her high evaluation of my teaching abilities. She said:

Sarah challenges students in ways that are **unique and profound**. However, she does so in such a kind and gentle way that they embrace rather than resist the lessons she teaches. I am amazed at her skill and her compassion.

Emily Estrada, a graduate student colleague, also observed and evaluated my teaching. Her perspective is unique because in addition to observations made in my classroom at one point in time, I am also her peer teaching mentor:

Sarah is my peer teaching mentor. As a colleague once said, when Sarah teaches, “magic happens.” Through my observations of her classroom, I see what she meant. Rather than providing the answers and solutions herself, Sarah’s teaching practice involves asking her students to wrestle with questions. Some questions are meant to check comprehension of the material, while others challenge the students to discover knowledge on their own. When students are allowed to uncover pieces of the sociological puzzle for themselves, the knowledge they gain is much more profound. Sarah is an effective communicator. Her message is clear and delivered with a great deal of enthusiasm; her teaching-style is not only informative, it is performative. Sarah’s passion for sociology and teaching are exceptional and, lucky for me, contagious.

Sarah’s passion for sociology and teaching are exceptional and, lucky for me, contagious

Sarah’s supportive teaching mentorship shows me *why* inquiry-guided learning techniques are effective and *how* I can incorporate them into in my own teaching practice. Sarah excels at teaching students how to think critically and she has helped me develop these skills. When I chose to adopt a more challenging textbook, Sarah shared all of her materials for this new text: notes, discussion questions, activities, and advice for effectively and mindfully responding to students’ sometimes challenging questions, comments, or counterpoints. I am a more engaged and effective teacher because of Sarah; I know that her encouragement and guidance will stay with me throughout my teaching career.

Mentoring Minority Students

I am committed to teaching and mentoring African American and other minority students and will thrive in an environment where this is possible. I acknowledge the obstacles – both institutionally and interpersonally – that minority students may face on a college campus and seek to provide teaching and mentorship that is empowering and supportive. Although NC State is a predominately white institution, I have had numerous opportunities to teach and mentor minority students, particularly African Americans.

I have formed strong mentoring relationships with several African American students over the years – in fact, nearly all of the students who keep in touch with me for letters of reference or to update me about their lives, are African American. They tell me there is something I do or offer them that

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they appreciate, value, and/or don't get elsewhere on campus. In order to capture the valuable impact my mentorship has had on them, I decided to ask them to elaborate. Below are statements on mentorship from four African American students – all of whom I taught in the classroom and who have maintained relationships with me throughout college, and for some, beyond graduation.

As an African-American male, it is rare that I am able to bond with someone who is not of the same social group...Sarah [has a] unique ability to maintain a sense of flair and unbridled enthusiasm for...the plight of the underrepresented in a manner that is relevantly informed. The idea is that an instructor should give you the tools to make your own conclusions without clouding your personal inquiry with their own paradigms. This is at the heart of what our relationship is about. I know where Sarah stands on many important societal issues, however, her lens has never been forced upon me or anyone else. Sarah's delivery is matter-of-fact but respectful; blatant yet subtle; and bold yet subdued. Sarah is a rarity and a necessity in the field of Sociology and would be a valuable addition to any entity whose mission is to contribute to our global society. - **Justin**

I am recent graduate of N.C State and I am honored to be able to speak on the behalf of my favorite professor, Sarah Rusche...She was able to open my mind to a lot of ideas. I had plenty of "ah-ha" moments in her class. Even though I am African-American, I was sometimes blind to some of the struggles many people face. I felt like Professor Rusche actually understood when she talked about the minorities' experience. That helped me connect to her. Also, as a freshman I felt very lost and she actually gave me confidence. As an African American student in a predominantly white institution - that was comforting. She gave so much encouragement and guidance...

I believe she is very capable of being a teacher and mentor to African- American students.

I have never connected to any other professor like I have with Professor Rusche. I believe she has a lot to offer to other students and would have a positive impact on their lives. - **Kendra**

Teaching Awards and Honors

WINNER, OUTSTANDING PAPER COMPETITION Society for the Study of Social Problem's Teaching Social Problems Division for the paper "Welcoming the Personal as Sociological: Critical Self-Reflection and Transformation in the Classroom" (Kendra Jason co-authored)

SAGE/Pine Forge **TEACHING INNOVATIONS & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AWARD:** American Sociological Association's Section on Teaching and Learning. 2010.

The Teaching Innovations and Professional Development award contributed significantly to my ongoing development as a teacher-scholar. I not only created networks with other teachers both new and seasoned, but also acquired skills and ideas for classroom exercises, managing conflict, developing new courses, finding ways to balance teaching and research, and disrupting this false dichotomy, thus supporting the teacher-scholar I strive to be. This pre-conference workshop was my official entrance and membership in the Teaching Movement of ASA.

THANK A TEACHER AWARD, NC State 2010-11 (2-time recipient)

The Office of Faculty Development congratulated me on receiving a "Thank a Teacher" award. This program is, as they put it, "a way to honor NC State faculty who have made a difference in students' lives." Since this is what I strive to do, I was honored.

EXCELLENT TEACHING MENTOR AWARD, NC State 2008

In March, 2008 I was awarded the first Excellent Mentor Award for my teaching mentorship, by the Sociology Graduate Student Association at NC State. This award was based on my informal mentoring to newer graduate student teachers. Since then, I have had the pleasure of being a formal teaching mentor in the Summer START program. I was honored to receive this award and flattered by the statement composite from those who nominated me:

Sarah Rusche loves teaching and is eager to help new graduate instructors become successful and effective too. Whether that means offering practical advice on a lesson plan, helping them keep a difficult day in perspective, or reminding them that it's always harder when you care about being good at what you do, Sarah is available to offer support. A lot of us are better, saner instructors because Sarah has graced us with her talents and attention.

Teaching Appointments and Fellowships

INSTRUCTOR

I have been an instructor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at NC State since 2003. I also taught as an adjunct at Elon University during their intensive winter terms (2008-2009). I have taught Principles of Sociology, Social Problems, Social Psychology, Sociology through Film, and Women and Men in Society in traditional classroom settings and/or online.

FIRST YEAR INQUIRY⁴ (FYI) TEACHING FELLOW, NC State 2006-2009

I was selected to be a **teaching fellow** in NC State's First Year Inquiry (FYI) Program and taught in the program for four years. The FYI program's pedagogical foundation is inquiry guided learning; teachers selected for the program are trained in this teaching and learning approach. With courses capped at an ideal size (22), this program provides a small-college environment for students. Through this fellowship I collaborated in a linked-course model with First Year College. This model links one disciplinary course (e.g., sociology) with a basic college skills course taught by students' academic advisor. All 20 students are in both sections, thus fostering a learning community through the link. This interdisciplinary, learner-focused program had a significant impact on the teacher I am today.

SUMMER START TEACHING FELLOW⁵, NC State, Summer 2010, Summer 2011

I was later selected to be a **teaching fellow** and **teaching mentor** in the pilot year of NC State's Summer START program. In addition to teaching in the program, I also played a role in its development. This program is designed to help incoming first year students make the transition from high school to college during the summer session. The program has unique demographics compared to the general student population; most students are members of racial/ethnic minority groups and/or come from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds.

⁴ You can read more about the FYI Program here:

http://www.ncsu.edu/firstyearinquiry/faculty_info/faculty_info.htm

⁵ You can read more about Summer START here: <http://www.ncsu.edu/summer/start/index.html>

Publications on Teaching and Learning

- Rusche, Sarah Nell and Kendra Jason. 2011. "You Have to Absorb Yourself in It': Using Inquiry and Reflection to Promote Student Learning." *Teaching Sociology* 39:338-353.
- Parrotta, Kylie and Sarah Nell Rusche. 2011. "Extra Terrestrials and Generic Social Processes: Minimizing Resistance in Teaching the Reproduction of Inequality." *Teaching Sociology* 39:320-328.
- Macomber, Kris and Sarah Nell Rusche. 2011. "Using Students' Racial Memories to Teach about Racial Inequality." *Feminist Teacher* 20, 3: 214-225.
- Macomber, Kris, Sarah E. Rusche, and Maxine P. Atkinson. 2009. "From the Outside Looking In: The Sociology of the Classroom." *Teaching Sociology* 37:228-232.
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What Does it Mean to be An Excellent Teacher? A Reflection

An excellent teacher is enthusiastic, resourceful, uses active learning, makes students think and do, off-loads the content, is a creative assessor, loves what she does, is generous with feedback, gives students a voice, is adaptable, and

An excellent teacher is an enthusiastic, resourceful teacher-learner

is a teacher-learner. An excellent teacher tunes in to her students to see where they are coming from and what they would like to leave with. An excellent teacher is sensitive to students' needs yet

comfortable pushing their boundaries of intellectual existence. An excellent teacher creates an environment where students truly want to be there and to learn. An excellent teacher is not *only* these things; she is also effective.

An effective teacher has clear goals and learning outcomes and carefully prepares ways to achieve these. An effective teacher designs assessments that suit the teaching and learning practiced; assessments that assess learning, not memorization. An effective teacher is a scholar who uses insights of the discipline and applies them to the classroom. An effective teacher uses scholarship on teaching and

learning to enhance her teaching practice and also contributes to this literature by publishing in journals and books about teaching. An effective teacher has learned how to create exercises and assessments to

An effective teacher creates exercises and assessments to achieve desired learning outcomes.

achieve the desired learning outcome. An effective teacher has a teaching philosophy, is reflective, admits and learns from mistakes and weaknesses, provides clear expectations for work, and is always improving, revising, or adjusting her pedagogical tricks of the trade.

I strive to be both excellent and effective; I use reflection as a tool for assessing my success at this. Reflecting on teaching helps me think of ways to update my course with fresh ideas, new activities, new readings, or new ways of organizing things. One reflection led me to see that my pedagogy did not align with my scholarly knowledge. Without my reflections, and my teacher-scholar approach, I may not have identified the need for a change. Here is what I discovered:

My students read an article by Patricia Hill Collins⁶ called “Toward a New Vision” to start the unit on inequality. Collins emphasizes her classic point that oppressions intersect and urges us to examine oppression at the individual, symbolic, and institutional levels instead of by category of oppression (race, class, gender). I always agree with her yet I habitually proceed to teach inequality by categories of oppression. I decided to transform the course altogether. I tried to fulfill Collins’ vision by examining each form of oppression across the levels at which it is experienced and reproduced. Instead of discussing each category of oppression, we examine how oppression is experienced and perpetuated at the symbolic, individual, and institutional levels. This revamping challenged me to think more critically about the readings I assigned.

I brought scholarship to bear on my teaching and used reflection to link my teaching with my scholarship.

I brought scholarship to bear on my teaching and used reflection to link my teaching with my scholarship. As a teacher-scholar, the integration of these practices is essential. The syllabus for this revamped Principles of Sociology course is above. Whatever and whoever I am teaching, I consistently reflect upon my teaching. For me, reflection is central to the process of becoming an excellent and effective teacher.

⁶ Collins, Patricia Hill. 1998. “Toward a New Vision: Race, Class, and Gender as Categories of Analysis and Connection.” *Race, Sex, and Class*, vol. 1, no. 1.

Sample Syllabus (abridged)

Principles of Sociology

Student Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the semester you should be able to:

- Demonstrate active learning skills
- Ask deep probing questions
- Apply the sociological perspective and sociological knowledge to explain various aspects of social life
- Identify and explain several sociological concepts (i.e. society, culture, inequality)
- Trace out the connections and patterns in social life
- Read, write, research, think, and work like a sociologist

Required Texts:

Schwalbe, Michael. 2008. *The Sociologically Examined Life*, 4rd edition, New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Companies.

Andersen, Margaret L., Kim A. Logio, and Howard F. Taylor. 2009. *Understanding Society: An Introductory Reader*, 3rd edition. Belmont, CA: Thompson-Wadsworth.

Course Assignments and Grading:

Class Participation 15%. Our class is discussion-based and will involve in-class exercises. Participation is required.

Attendance and Preparation 5%. Attend class each day, prepared to discuss the material. If you must miss class, please notify me before class via email and show documentation for excused absences upon your return.

Critical Writing Journals 30%. This is a semester long assignment that has several components and will require organizational abilities on your part. *Once a week*, on the day and reading of your choice, you must submit a one-page critical reflection paper. In a paper folder with clasps, place the reflection papers in chronological order after I've graded and returned them. Keep these in a safe place; you will need them at the end of the semester to write a final analytic reflection paper⁷.

⁷ For a full description of this semester-long exercise, see Rusche, Sarah Nell and Kendra Jason. 2011. "You Have to Absorb Yourself in It: Using Inquiry and Reflection to Promote Student Learning." *Teaching Sociology* 39:338-353.

The purpose of this assignment is to offer you a place to think deeply and critically about the reading and to provide an avenue for sociological engagement. This will help you understand the reading, remember what you read, and also prepare you to discuss the material critically. Good reflections offer a balance between (a) summary of argument; (b) reactions to the arguments, connections to other readings, or relation to personal experience; and (c) critical thinking or discussion questions.

Three Stream Assessments 50%. There are three streams, or sections of the course. Each stream aims to answer questions about the social world. Stream assessments assess your grasp and knowledge of this material, asking you to think like a sociologist. More specific instructions and grading rubrics will be provided.

- *Stream 1:* What is sociology? What does it mean to think and work like a sociologist?
- *Stream 2:* How is society organized and where do I fit? How do social arrangements enable and constrain social behavior?
- *Stream 3:* How is inequality built into society? How is inequality perpetuated? How does inequality shape individuals' experiences?

Stream Assessments: Sample Questions

Note: These questions do not appear on the actual syllabus. This is for illustration purposes only. Taken together, these assess each student learning outcome stated on the syllabus.

Stream 1: In "Inventing the Social World," Schwalbe argues that the powerful (dominant) groups in society tend to shape the culture, and in turn the ideas people accept as true. Give a concrete example from the movie "Pleasantville" that illustrates this concept. Be brief but complete (3-5 sentences).

Stream 3: Using a sociological lens, consider how the social problem "unequal access to health care" operates at each level of oppression. In other words, say how oppression and privilege with regard to this issue operates at the institutional, symbolic, and individual levels. You should incorporate race, class and gender in your discussion. Use 2-3 course readings and 2 legitimate news sources that cover the health care issue to frame your discussion.

READING LIST

STREAM 1: WHAT IS SOCIOLOGY? WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO THINK AND WORK LIKE A SOCIOLOGIST?

The Sociological Perspective

The Sociological Imagination
The Forest and the Trees
TSEL⁸ Preface and Ch.1

Sociological Research and Theory

TSEL p. 238-249
TSEL Ch. 3
TSEL p. 124-126; 127-131; 135-136

The Social Construction of Reality

TSEL Ch.2
Social Construction of Difference
Social Construction of Gender
FILM: Pleasantville

STREAM 2: HOW IS SOCIETY ORGANIZED AND WHERE DO I FIT? HOW DO SOCIAL ARRANGEMENTS ENABLE AND CONSTRAIN SOCIAL BEHAVIOR?

Culture

Sept. 11...Consumer Culture
Men and Women: Mind and Body

The Self and Society

TSEL p. 56-65
TSEL Ch. 5
Leaving Home for College

Social Interaction

TSEL Ch. 6
Code of the Street

⁸ TSEL = The Sociologically Examined Life

Contingency and Cause

TSEL Ch. 8

Power in Social Life

TSEL Ch. 10

STREAM 3: HOW IS INEQUALITY BUILT INTO SOCIETY? HOW IS INEQUALITY PERPETUATED? HOW DOES INEQUALITY SHAPE INDIVIDUALS' EXPERIENCES?

Social Inequality

FILM: 30 Days on Minimum Wage

TSEL Ch. 11

The Rest Room and Equal Opportunity

Three Dimensions of Oppression

Toward a New Vision

Institutional Dimension

Patriarchy
Weaving Work and Motherhood
Social Organization of Toy Stores
The Nanny Chain

American Apartheid
Dishonoring the Dead
FILM: Race: the Power of an Illusion

Symbolic Dimension

Souls of Black Folk
Ain't I a Beauty Queen?
On Hidden Injuries of Class

Barbie Girls and Sea Monsters
Everyday Race Making

Individual Dimension

Sexual Assault on Campus
Get a Life, Girls
Doing Family
Heterosexism Fact Sheet
A Black Woman Took My Job

The Color of the Safety Net
White and Male Privilege
Male and Heterosexual Privilege
Race is Always Part of the Story

FILMS: Tough Guise, Mirrors of Privilege

End of Course Discussion

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