

TEACHING/LEARNING MATTERS

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Chair's Corner



Melinda Messineo, Ph.D.

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Every day I am reminded of how important it is that we teach sociology. Perhaps your experience is similar, but here at Ball State University we have many more sociology minors than majors. While this can be a challenging situation in terms of resource allocation, I find it to be immensely positive because of what it

means in terms of outreach. The lens that sociology gives all students is a powerful tool for social change and that change begins within the individuals themselves. Nurturing sociology majors is critical but the majority of the students we meet will not be majors which means our impact is broad and connects to all fields and professions. This is a phenomenal position to be in so we want to leverage the time we have with our students as much as possible. One aspect of this contact I hope we will emphasize is the degree to which sociology fosters “intellectual humility”.

In our capstone class we emphasize how sociology as a discipline encourages “intellectual humility”. By that, I mean the degree to which we are able to step back, reflect on our positionality, and challenge our assumptions. We help our students recognize this aspect of their development by asking them to recall a time when they were intellectually humble. I will never forget when a student chimed in and said, “I have grown accustomed to realizing everything I thought I knew about the world is wrong. That makes you really humble real quick.” The class laughed and nodded that they had at times felt “wrong”. What I would want to clarify is that humility is not simply anticipating that what you know is ‘wrong’ but instead knowing that any understanding of the world is incomplete. Sociology helps students bring a more critical and comprehensive view of the world and their experiences into focus. Students are encouraged to ask “What are the assumptions I am bringing to this situation? How is my position in society impacting my experience and perceptions? What larger social forces are at play that I may not be cognizant of at this time?”

I would also like to encourage us all to engage in “intellectual humility” as we work with our students. In what ways can we step back, be more reflective, and challenge our own assumptions? Are we creating the most inclusive classroom environment possible knowing that we are reaching the world? This year we will be exploring these ideas of inclusion and humility. I look forward to taking this journey together.

Editor's Introduction



Andrea N. Hunt, Ph.D.

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I felt invigorated as I returned home from the annual meetings in Philadelphia. The Pre-Conference Teaching Workshop provided many opportunities to engage with colleagues and discuss timely issues related to teaching with technology. The Teaching and Learning Symposium was new to the program this year and I encourage you all to participate in it next year. This fall we welcome new officers, council members, and committee leadership to our section as we continue to extend our thanks to those who have served and are still serving in leadership roles.

We begin this issue by honoring Keith Roberts who passed away on July 27, 2018. Keith influenced many of us through his commitment to teaching, his support of graduate students and junior faculty, and his involvement in public sociology. Keith embodied the “intellectual humility” that Melinda Messineo calls for in her Chair’s Corner. I hope that you will take a moment of reflection and ask how you can make a difference in our discipline and in the teaching of sociology like Keith did.

In this issue, Keith Johnson addresses contingent faculty and how the disclosure of their status affects teaching. Next, we learn about online office hours and how to mentor in online spaces from Lydia Hou. Alexandra Veselka-Bush provides a great example of the intersection of arts and sociological inquiry. Scott Grether closes this issue with a review of Sociology in

Action. Don’t miss the TRAILS call for editors at the end of the issue. Enjoy!

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Dr. Keith A. Roberts
January 30, 1947 - July 27, 2018



Dr. Keith A. Roberts of Minneapolis died on Friday, July 27, 2018. He had 20 months of living meaningfully with stage four cancer. Keith was an extraordinary college teacher, having won teaching awards at the local, state, regional, and national levels—including two from the American Sociological Association. He conducted workshops on teaching across the country and was known for his work on “deep learning.” In 2012 he was presented with the J. Milton Yinger Award for Distinguished Lifetime Career in Sociology by the North Central Sociological Association. His doctorate was from Boston University and he was a Professor Emeritus of sociology at Hanover College in Indiana. On his campus he served as Sociology/Anthropology Department Chair (15 years), Faculty Marshall, and Faculty Parliamentarian.

He produced highly acclaimed textbooks in sociology of religion (*Religion in Sociological Perspective*. SAGE; with David Yamane) and two introductory sociology texts (*Our Social World* and *Our Social World condensed*: SAGE, both with Jeanne Ballantine and Kathleen Korgen). He also co-authored other books for sociologists about teaching and on mentoring student writing, and for graduate students on finding a job at a teaching-oriented institution.

Keith also co-founded a unique awards program, funded in the first year by the authors and the publisher of *Our Social World* (Jeanne Ballantine and Keith Roberts). The SAGE Teaching Innovations & Professional Development Award is designed to prepare a new generation of scholars within the Teaching Movement in Sociology. The funds provide support to graduate students and untenured faculty members to attend the Section on Teaching and Learning’s preconference workshop on college teaching. Since 2006, the program has provided awards for over 300 graduate students and newly

minted PhD’s to attend the teaching workshop. The total given to support these young scholars is now over \$200,000. The ASA Section on Teaching and Learning administers the award and approximately twenty SAGE authors co-sponsor it every year with SAGE. There is no other publisher or collection of authors in the country doing anything like this with book royalties from textbooks.

In addition, Keith was involved in public sociology, working on issues of racial and economic justice. He testified many times at the state legislature on policies that enhance systemic racism and often was seen at the statehouse talking to legislators. He was also involved with global social justice groups, having participated in human rights delegations to Guatemala, Honduras, and Colombia. His passion for justice influenced many people who knew him well and is shown in his books.

During his engagement with cancer and efforts at health reclamation, he authored a book, *Meaning Making with Malignancy: A Theologically Trained Sociologist Reflects on Living Meaningfully with Cancer* (Covenant Books) that has been well received and widely read. Book discussion groups formed through churches and hospitals now read and benefit from *Meaning Making with Malignancy*.

Keith was very active in Mayflower UCC church and taught a variety of courses for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI). He is survived by his wife of 50 years (Judy Conkle Roberts), three children, and four grandchildren: son Justin (and Miriam) and their two children, Adina and Naomi; son Kent and his son Zain; daughter Elise Roberts (and spouse Brett Weber) and their daughter Ramona.

A memorial service for Keith was held at 4:00 on August 4, 2018, at the Mayflower UCC church in Minneapolis.

On Revealing One's Contingent Status and its Effect on Teaching



Keith Johnson

Being an adjunct/contingent professor has its negatives, but for some adjunct faculty it is a source of contact with students and of personal narratives about the concepts of sociology. In the Philadelphia meetings this August I did a pilot test of a survey for part-time faculty by stopping registrants in the display area and asking them about their status and whether it affected their teaching. Here are some of the findings.

Some sociology instructors (SI) reveal personal characteristics that they feel will reduce the social distance between them and their students. One SI revealed his age in order to show he was close to his students' ages, while a second revealed that he was teaching his first classes. However, neither one revealed that he was an adjunct.

Other SIs felt that they have reasons for not revealing their contingent status. One felt a social separation from his students by his origins (Asian, and not speaking English fluently). He felt he had enough negative about his status to reveal still more, so he "stayed in the closet." Others either had not thought about revealing their part-time status or also felt that it would be an admission that would lose students' respect.

Full-time faculty assumed that their adjunct colleagues would not reveal their status. As one professor stated, "75 percent are adjunct faculty at my institution. I don't think any admit that they aren't regular professors."

Some graduate students felt that, although they were not teaching yet, adjunct professors should not reveal their status. "They are a professor and should act and be treated like one," as one stated. Another agreed, "Adjuncts should be treated equally. Everyone knows about their situation so they don't need to talk about it. It is not necessary to tell, they should be just like any other professor." In contrast, one student

mentioned that she did her paper on the adjunct faculty and showed a film on the subject to her social problems class. She concluded that the SI adjuncts should tell their students and make the problem public so the universities would treat their adjuncts better. Students were divided over whether it would be better to be open and honest or not mention their part-time status. A more nuanced opinion came from one graduate student who felt that there would be no need to tell undergraduates, but graduate students needed to know and discuss the problems of getting employed in today's economy.

However, Some SI respondents found their adjunct experience to be more positive. One SI reported that he had lots of first generation students, and they could identify with another part-timer (him) in our gig economy. As a result he had only positive experiences from revealing his adjunct status, and used it to teach concepts in sociology.

Other adjunct faculty described their full-time job's contribution to sociology, and used it to complement their part-time status. Those with only part-time SI employment often revealed their status to help explain sociological concepts, such as the sociological imagination, inequality, occupations and professions, stratification, and social problems.

It is too early to draw conclusions about this emerging study, except that the relationship between being an adjunct and teaching sociology is more complex than at first view, and is worth our attention.

Final Word: I have a short survey as a result of this pilot. You can participate in the survey at https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfOLfimBOd8tJ7iBwQMYtn50R9Ig7BCUVcPwKi_0iuFgRauXw/viewform?usp=sf_link Contact me for information: keithjohnson101@gmail.com

On Being Present: Electronic Office Hours and Mentorship in an Online Space



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A simple Google search for “Millennials” or Generation Z” can quickly turn up numerous accounts of the ways that people now choose to communicate with each other in an increasingly online world. These conversations also pervade our pedagogical philosophies, as we take up both political and strategic positions on the role of technology in our classrooms. Some cite tech devices as a problem for long-term retention (Glass and Kang 2018) with distraction to blame for poor test scores. Others argue that technology in the classroom is a necessary component of not only a new approach to learning, but also one that could “equalize learning differences” associated with diverse learning styles and accommodations (Daly 2018). Given complex conversations on the role of technology as part of the classroom, it becomes necessary to also consider the role that it can play in extending interaction among students and teachers beyond the classroom meeting space. For many, the days of a student stopping by their professor’s office for office hours asking “hey, do you have a minute” are gone, replaced by constant demands on the time of both teacher and learner.

According to the US Department of Education, as of 2011 some 51 percent of college faculty were part-time (Edmonds 2015), with many graduate students playing dual role as student and teacher by entering the adjuncting world far in advance to completion of their PhDs.

Simply put, many higher education instructors and their students do not have the flexibility to meet in physical office hours at a set time each week, yet the benefits of these meetings can be tremendous not just for student academic success but also for fostering a learning environment in which students and instructors learn from each other. Electronic office

hours are often implemented in online courses, a necessary structural choice, yet they are not as often utilized otherwise despite a growing need to do so (Croxall 2010). While an important tool for increasing our ability to meet with and mentor undergraduate students may be the use of electronic office hours, there is a need for training on how to create successful online mentoring spaces. Very little guidance is given to graduate students and part time faculty in how to be a mentor to undergraduate students, and office hours are often addressed simply as a requirement of employment and a necessary but unfortunate stress on already limited time and resources. There is a need to institutionalize conversations around how to best facilitate online spaces in which undergraduate students can be mentored by their instructors and to make those spaces both effective and supportive.

What constitutes a mentoring relationship in such a capacity? How can we emphasize to our students that we truly want to help them and work with them, we just cannot actually see them in person? Many questions could guide our approach to this teaching and learning strategy, and mentorship should perhaps be an overriding focus. We need to offer our students a space in which they can address both academic and technical issues as well as those more philosophical in nature. These spaces need to accommodate the typical “why did I get this grade” conversation, as well as allow for the kinds of sociological discussions in which students come to truly relate course material to the world around them a la the sociological imagination. Office hours are perhaps one of the least utilized tools students have at their disposal to really engage with what they are learning in their sociology classes and increasing online spaces for this is necessary for the future of instructor/student mentorship. But first, we need to develop intersectional strategies for making those spaces inclusive and work to create real models of online mentorship. Sometimes, in order to really be present for our students, we need to understand the necessity of not being physically present and instead embrace efforts to support our students through the flexibility of electronic spaces. When considering our pedagogical positions, we must include ideas around online mentorship and paths to true mutual teaching and learning in a flexible and inclusive electronic landscape.

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How Expressive Arts Can Aid Social Inquiry



Alexandra Veselka-Bush
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Last fall, I introduced a group 'zine' project for my sociology of gender course. Zines are small circulation magazines that creators publish, produce and distribute themselves (Duncombe 2008). Zines are part of an underground subculture that attempts to present information in radical, off-beat ways (Duncombe 2008). While this project allows students to further explore aspects of gender outside of the classroom, it also gives them ways to merge praxis and theory. It introduces them to ways in which they can create action and advocate for others.

At my institution, sociology of gender is a course that meets requirements for sociology, LGBT studies and women's studies majors. Many departments, such as

journalism, art, media studies, etc., suggest the course during advising. As a result, my classes are usually academically diverse. I really wanted to provide my students with a course project that could allow each of them to make use of their academic strengths. The Zine Project does just that. However, many of my students from less creative disciplines really struggle with realizing their imaginative selves and collaborating on creative projects. While I do not judge their ability to be creative (logically, as I am a sociology instructor, not an art instructor), I do expect them to imbue some creativity in these projects. They should make others *want* to read them. This aspect of the project causes many of my students some concern. This make sense, as many of them generally have been told that imaginative and scholarly are at opposite ends of a spectrum.

In an effort to challenge this belief and help my students see the ways in which ingenuity and scholarly pursuits can intersect, I am having them complete in-class 'workshops' throughout the semester. In these workshops, students will complete projects in their groups that can be used for the zine project, if they wish, or at the very least, allow them experience ways in which they can be collaborative and creatively execute scholarly ideas.

In the first workshop, 'Newsworthy Poetry,' I asked students to bring in a printed copy of a current event article that concerns gender. I split them into groups and gave each group a pair of scissors and a glue stick. From there, I asked them to share their articles with the group members and pick one for the group. Based on the article each group picked, they were told to cut out words from the article and paste them on paper to create a poem. The poems did not need to summarize the article, but they should stick with the theme of the article.

At first, many of the students were unsure and kept telling me that they weren't going to be any good at this. As they worked, I went around the room and listened as they navigated creative collaboration. After 30 minutes, I asked them to share the poems. As each group got up to read a poem, they all were awestruck at their accomplishments. After each poem, the room erupted in snaps and some students had even more emotional responses. After the course, I had multiple students reach out to express praise for the

assignment and shock that they could all produce such moving poems!

While this project is intended to be a small in-class activity to help my students prepare for a larger project, I believe it could be a useful in other ways. Each of these poems could be used to have a broader conversation about the themes and the ways in which current events intersect with a course. Presenting the information in this way allows students to move beyond small details and start to look at larger themes.

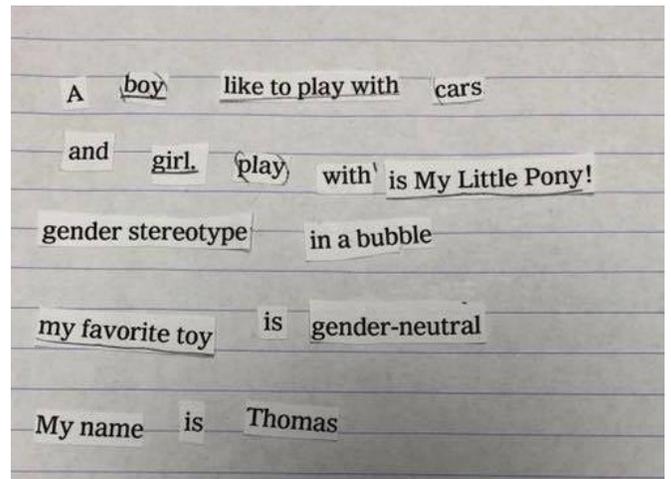
As a sociology instructor, I want to provide my students with the tools to express themselves and become agents of social change. Recognizing the ways in which social inquiry and creative expression can intersect may help them achieve those goals. I want to create a classroom that is accessible to students from various backgrounds because I truly believe that students from all disciplines could use a sociological foundation. Many disciplines have the larger goal of helping students become advocates or social justice warriors. Having a background in sociology is imperative for this goal. I would strongly encourage you all to find ways to make your classrooms more accessible to art and humanities students, but also find ways to help your students find value in creative pursuits.

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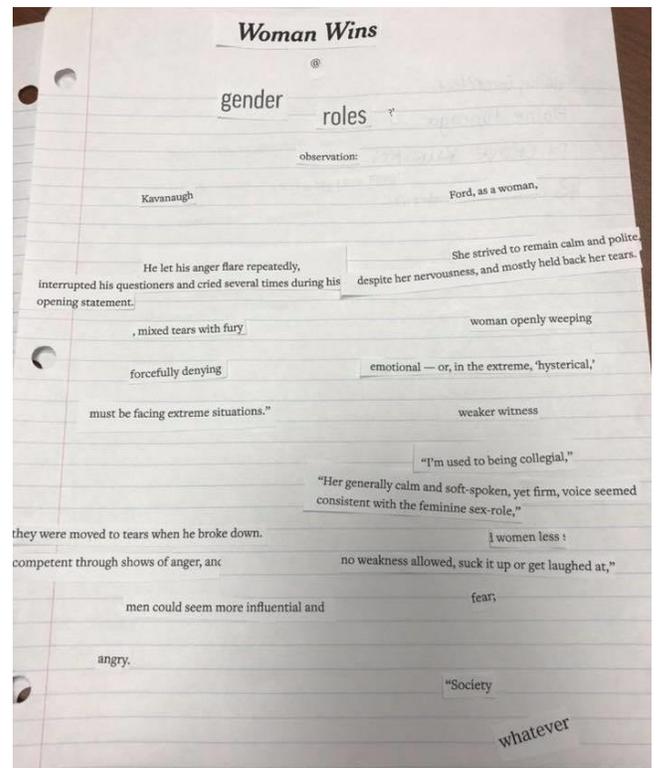
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Group work from Newsworthy Poetry workshop (Shared with permission from students.)



Group work from Newsworthy Poetry workshop (Shared with permission from students.)



Group work from Newsworthy Poetry workshop (Shared with permission from students.)

Review of *Sociology in Action*



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Korgen, Kathleen O. and Maxine P. Atkinson. 2019. *Sociology in Action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Sociology in Action (SIA) illustrates how and why sociology matters. We live in a time where many people question the value of a liberal arts education. SIA is a needed antidote to these myopic views. It demonstrates to students why sociology matters in understanding and improving the social world and how people use sociology in their career. It does this in four unique ways which distinguish it from other introductory texts:

Learning Questions (LQs). The LQs at the beginning of each chapter are useful for students and instructors. They can direct student's attention while reading and make it easier for retaining the material. Additionally, LQs can aid instructors in designing lessons plans. For instance, students can answer LQs on their own and bring their answers into subsequent classes. This can be a great way to review the material, serve as a reading check, or as a way to foster classroom discussion.

Check Your Understanding (CYU). SIA poses reading questions throughout each chapter called CYU. This subtle design forces the reader to become an active participant in the text. For example, one CYU question is, "What are the differences and similarities between the statistical, legalistic, and normative approaches to defining deviance" (2019: 103). Posing this as a question, rather than summarizing the information, forces students to review the text and actively search for the answers. Whether or not students actually do this, however, is another matter.

Doing Sociology (DS). Each chapter contains several DS exercises where students can apply their newly-acquired knowledge in a practical way. These exercises are a great way to integrate active-learning activities

into a course. For example, DS 8.2 is entitled "Creating Gender by Designing Candles." Students must design two candles for men – specifying the shape, color, size, and fragrance of each candle. Next, they have to write several paragraphs on how they factored gender into their design and how the process of creating these candles compares and contrasts from how people create meaning to gender.

Sociologists in Action. The numerous contributions from academic sociologists, sociology majors, and non-academic sociologists who discuss how they use sociology in their career further illustrates how and why sociology matters. For example, in Chapter 3 David Schleifer (a senior research associate at Public Agenda) discusses how sociological research can inform public policy and public perception of how and why Americans research price information in health care before seeking medical care. Students unfamiliar with sociology will hopefully find these sections illustrative of "the promise" in thinking sociologically.

Like all textbooks, SIA contains a few limitations which could provide a source of frustration for students and instructors:

The price. Many of the students I'm currently teaching across three sections of introduction to sociology believe that \$90 is too expensive for a textbook. However, according to one estimate, SIA is only \$10 more than the average price of a new textbook for a college course (NACS 2017). It is also a bargain compared to other introductory textbooks in sociology (some cost around \$160). This is also a good lesson in teaching students how to think sociologically! While students may feel they pay too much for SIA, they should be aware that the costs of college textbooks in the United States rose an estimated 88 percent between 2006 and 2016 (BLS 2016). Which begs the question, why do college textbooks cost so much money?

The Topics. The topics covered in SIA may not be appealing for some. For instance, there are no chapters on politics or the economy. I find this peculiar given our current public discourse on these specific topics. Having chapters which provide students a sociological understanding of these two social institutions would be important to improving SIA for a 2nd edition. However, deciding what topics to include,

and not to include, is not an easy task and does diminish the effectiveness of SIA.

This is a great textbook for first time instructors and those seeking new ways to refresh their teaching. My students like this text because of the integration of topics which relate directly to their life (e.g., a sociological analysis of student loans), the accessible writing, and the reading reviews disbursed throughout the text.

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TRAILS Area Editors are part of the network of passionate educators dedicated to supporting excellence in teaching and learning in sociology. Their main responsibility – reviewing submissions to TRAILS and mentoring authors through the publication process – is a crucial component of ASA’s commitment to promoting innovative teaching techniques and developing scholarly teachers. Inspired to work with us to support best practices in teaching sociology? We are accepting applications for the following subject areas:

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- Socialization
- Social Networks
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Newly appointed Area Editors will begin a three-year (renewable) term starting January 1, 2019. In addition to reviewing materials submitted to their subject area and making publication recommendations to the Editor, TRAILS Area Editors are responsible for promoting the digital library and working to expand the range, quantity, and quality of teaching resources in TRAILS.

Applicants should be members of the ASA, have a PhD in sociology, and have a demonstrated commitment to teaching and learning in the discipline. A publication record in TRAILS is viewed favorably. Please send a statement of interest and CV to trails@asanet.org with the subject line “Area Editor Application.” Applications will be reviewed starting immediately and continue until positions are filled.