Staying the *Course*:

Persistence and Opportunities to Learn Sociology in a

Community College Classroom

By

Charles L. Lord

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Higher Education)
in the University of Michigan
2015

Doctoral Committee:
Professor Edward P. St. John, Chair
Associate Professor Peter R. Bahr
Professor Pamela A. Moss
Assistant Professor Larry L. Rowley
Emeritus Professor David J. Tucker

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents Charles and Barbara, who seem never to lose faith, to my daughters Anya and Estelle who bring out the best in everyone they touch and of course to Patti, who made every single thing possible.

Acknowledgements

My intellectual inspirations over the years are too numerous to mention. Nonetheless, a few have been the soil upon which all the rest has been built: the wonderful late Venezuelan cultural anthropologist Fernando Coronil, the cognitive anthropologist, Larry Hirschfeld and the incomparable Canadian sociologist and social work /social policy researcher, David Tucker, whom I was fortunate enough to retain on my committee.

Gone, but certainly never forgotten, I would like to acknowledge my old Anthro buddies, Penelope, Rachel, Laura and Riyad -- And from my second academic home of Higher Education, I would like to acknowledge my former colleagues Nate Daun-Barnett and Xu Li.

Of recent, I have drawn on a bottomless well of kindness from the "vodka-party-gang": Marie-Claire, Phil, David K; Lloulia, David D., Lisa, Penny, George, Monica and Andy. Indeed special thanks to Applied Anthropologist Andy Brown for helping to sustain my intellectual focus when circumstances were not always so conducive.

Thanks to my sisters and to my sister-in-law (Missy), whose unwavering enthusiasms on this journey have been as amazing as they have been motivational.

I would like to thank my committee for their guidance and thoughtful advice in helping me to understand what more I needed to do in order to become the scholar I wanted to be.

Special thanks to Higher Education, African American Studies scholar and committee member Larry Rowley who inspired me to be more than just a critic of the field, but to make it over in my own image. Finally, most deeply and most humbly, I would like to acknowledge my advisor, mentor and friend Ed. St. John -- who sustained my interest in academia when my interest was low, who had faith in me when I personally did not, and whose own scholarship and personal example led me to believe that philosophically minded scholars, with passions for social justice, curriculum and policy could be united within the same person, and within the field of Higher Education.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Student engagement in learning within courses and classrooms must be linked to college success but the topic has largely been overlooked in persistence research, especially in 2-year colleges. In part, the field of higher education has been dominated by a paradigm, premised on 4-year college experiences that employ a narrow conception of student academic integration. In studying student outcomes in the 2-year context, efforts to understand community college student engagement in learning could be hampered by the use of this dominant paradigm. Powerful though Vincent Tinto's Interactionalist theory might be (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2012) in explaining student integration into residential colleges (Braxton & Hirschy et al, 2004) it largely overlooks classroom teaching and learning; wide application of the theory in studies of college success neglects the important role of teaching in promoting student success. This is an especially serious problem for community colleges with commuting students, for if community college students are to interact with their institutions at all, they will do so mostly in classrooms, *taking courses for content*.

This dissertation uses qualitative methods to develop an ethnographic appreciation of the course taking experience, exploring relationships between teaching and students' engagement in learning within introductory sociology courses at a community college. While the study does not directly relate to the dominant Interactionalist theory of persistence, it does explore the of re-conceptualizing persistence theory to include student engagement in learning[1].

This dissertation focused on teaching and learning experiences as essential elements of college students' success. I explore how the complexity and uniqueness of community colleges

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[1] Prior to Tinto`s model, student attrition was almost entirely framed through the lens of psychology. Student retention, or the lack thereof, was understood to be a reflection of individual attributes, skills, and motivation. Students who did not remain in their chosen college were deemed less able, less motivated or simply less interested in the bounty that college had to offer. As Tinto himself recollected (2007), research and practice 40 years ago had a decidedly "blame the victim" character"; "students failed, not institutions." Since the paradigm shift he helped usher in, the view of student retention has altered to account for the role of the environment, the institution in particular. This change of perspective also heralded what he called the "Age of Involvement", where research increasingly underscored the importance of student contact or involvement to a range of student outcomes, not the least of which was student retention.

could have ramifications for teaching as it relates to students' 'deep' engagement in learning sociology within classrooms. My research explores how instructors' teaching and students' engagement in an introductory sociology course can inform theory on student persistence. I used mixed qualitative methods—participant observation, interviews and analysis of textbook excerpts in a *multi-case study of college level teaching*—to develop case studies of instruction in three introductory sociology classrooms at one community college campus.

This introduction briefly reviews Tinto's theory, pointing to a few potential problems associated with using it to understand the relationship between teaching and learning experiences in community college classrooms. It examines differences between 2-year and 4-year colleges that could limit the direct application of this theory in the study of persistence by students in 2-year colleges. After, I describe the 'outermost' context for this research, higher education in New England itself. Next, I list the research questions that have guided the construction of my cases followed by the theoretical context that has guided their analysis.

Understanding the Problem

The relationship between student engagement in learning and the phenomenon of community college students' continuation is underappreciated in higher education. One aspect of the problem is that persistence models take too narrow of a perspective on the academic domain because of their bias towards the 4-year residential college experience. In particular, Tinto's concept of *academic integration,* which, though mindful of a college's academic dimension, is *not* specified with respect to the teaching and learning situation (Bensimon 2007; Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson, 1997). In fact most research that employs the concept has tended to focus on *extracurricular* activities instead (Wendel, Ward and Kinzie, 2009).

In current research literature, academic integration refers to a student's attachment to the intellectual life of the college and emerges from interactions with it (Tinto, 1993). Together with *social integration* it is a pivotal lever within the student persistence (or college retention) process [See Appendix 3]. Positive interactions/experiences within a college's *academic* and *social* systems, both formally and informally, lead to greater *integration* within those systems, increasing the likelihood that a student will persist at their college (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). Persistence and dropout decisions are ultimately a function of a student's *integration (or*

lack thereof) into the academic and social life of the college.

The theoretical concept of integration itself represents the extent that a student shares the normative attitudes and values of the college community (or of subgroups within it), abiding by the formal and informal structural requirements for membership in it. It is determined by the quantity and quality of interactions within both informal and formal realms, of both academic and social domains. Interactions within these 'domains' and their 'realms' lead students to reassess the goals and commitments they entered college with, which in turn influences their decisions whether or not to persist. Thus departure reflects a breakdown of commitments to staying at a college. And as helpful and productive as this image has been, it flies too high over teaching and learning itself to discern any of its potentially contributing influences.

This more muted role for teaching and learning in persistence likely reflects the residential experience of 4-year colleges than it does the 2-year commuter college experience (Braxton & Hirschy et al, 2004). Commuter students in general spend very little time on campus. The time they do spend is typically devoted to attending classes and meeting degree requirements (Tinto, 1993). Compared to their 4-year counterparts, opportunities for extracurricular relationships, let alone experiences outside of the classroom, are minimal.

Commuter colleges often lack the well-defined and structured social communities within which "membership" and a "sense of belonging", so vital to non-commuter college persistence, are created (Tinto, 1993; Carter and Hurtado, 1997, Kuh & Love, 2000). Indeed Braxton, Hirschy and McClendon (2004) have argued that an absence of meaningful interactions with other students puts commuters at risk of feeling isolated and disconnected from the institution. For these researchers, commuter colleges likely require their own persistence theory.

With little time actually spent on campus, the *academic experience* at a commuter college is almost exclusively tied to the classroom experience. In the absence of interactions within the social realm, Tinto's model itself points to the likely counterbalancing role that academic interactions must in turn play. Thus it is feasible that 'academics' play a *more* critical role in a 2-year college persistence process than a 4-year one. Tinto implied as much when he specified that for community college students, academic "success" was a *cumulative* thing, something that would have to be built "one course at a time" (CSSEE, 2008, p. 3). And if his model did not exactly specify exactly how we might examine success that is built "one course at a time", Tinto's writings have nonetheless pointed to the importance of *classrooms*: "Classrooms

are central to the process of retention[2] and the activities that occur therein are critical to the process through which students come to participate in the intellectual life of the institution" (Tinto, 1994, p.210)

Yet his model does not provide a lens for discerning features of the classroom experience that could be related to persistence. Academic integration as determined by students' interactions with faculty/staff is an exceedingly broad perspective and one in which teaching and learning interactions within classrooms are subsumed (Tinto, 1987) (see Appendix 3). Hence it is not surprising that research academic on integration has tended to focus on such variables as meetings with faculty and advisors, using the library, or attending out-of class academic activities.

Thus, Tinto's theory more adequately reflects the 4-year college persistence process than the 2-year college one. Its constituent concept of *academic integration* does not elevate the classroom experience for special significance, which, in a 2-year commuter college it is likely to have. Indeed, not only might commuter colleges warrant their own theory of persistence (Braxton & Hirschy et al, 2004) but perhaps persistence at a 2-year institution reflects a special case of commuter persistence. Perhaps our dominant persistence theories could be better adapted to the specific 2-year context. Below I examine what makes this 2-year context different from the 4-year. I argue that, given the distinctiveness of community colleges, it is essential to focus on the relationship between teachers' methods of instruction and students' engagement in learning as phenomena related to student continuation.

What is the two-year college distinction?

The 2-year community college and its predecessor, the junior college, are uniquely American institutions. Junior colleges had more in common with the rise of high schools in America[3] than with the much older and more global traditions that produced the 4-year colleges.[4]

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[2] I am taking the processes of retention and persistence as one and the same. However they differ with respect to their perspective. Retention, underscores what colleges could do to effect student departure, while persistence entails attributes of the individual associated with departure.

[3] The history of the community college movement has many parallels to the growth of high schools in the US. "Like the high school, the public junior college developed as an extension of the level of schooling below it. And like its predecessor, it also followed a course of development marked by contradictory purposes" (Labaree, 1997).

By 2012, 45% of all undergraduate students (or approximately 8.3 million students) were enrolled in public two-year colleges of which 40% were enrolled full-time (AAAC Facts, 2014).

In addition to being uniquely situated historically, several distinctive macro features of the community college suggest its purposes are not exactly coterminous with its 4-year counterparts. Clues to this difference lie in the fact that 41% percent of public community colleges offer terminal degrees that can be earned entirely on-line. Also, community colleges graduate significant numbers of socially significant semi-professions that do not require a bachelor's degree. They graduate 51% percent of new nurses and approximately 80% of all fire fighters, law enforcement officers and EMT's (CCSSE, 2008). Finally, 39% of all international undergraduates in the US are taught at community colleges.

The college has also grown tremendously over the last 50 years (McIntosh & Rouse, 2009).[5] Yet *symbolically* the community college is the "other" college -- the "step child" of the higher education system (McIntosh & Rouse, 2009; Goldrick-Rab, Carter, & Wenger, 2007). Some have argued that the 'otherness' of the community college originates in its semantic classification as *commuter* school; as categorically *not* residential. If *all* colleges are symbolically understood and measured with respect to a concept of "residentiality" (Kamens, 1977; Braxton & Hirschy, 2002), commuter institutions are deficient *by definition*. Indeed Braxton and Hirschy et al (2004) have gone so far as to suggest that commuter students who are less familiar with the concept of residentiality (and whose expectations are not guided by it) are more likely to persist! And with average tuition and fees amounting to $ 3,264 for the 2013-2014 year[6] for full-time students, community colleges are undeniably higher education's "low-cost" option, and likely accorded the same *relative* esteem afforded to 'bargain goods'.

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[4] A (2013) report, The Century Foundation Task Force on Preventing Community Colleges from Becoming Separate and Unequal entitled *Bridging the Higher Education Divide* described the parallels between community colleges and *pre* Brown v. Board of Education era, elementary and secondary schools in the US, arguing that today`s community college had come to reflect an altogether *separate* system of higher education, reserved for a conspicuously disproportionate number of poorer, working class and minority students. The report demonstrated how, compared to students at other types of institutions, community college students grossly underfunded and these essentially *separate* system are very far from equal.

[5] This too is comparison with 4 -year institutions. Two- year institutions have experienced tremendous growth over the last 50 year as total fall enrollment has grown by 5.1% percent each year, compared to the 2.5 percent yearly growth rate of four year institutions (US Department of Education, "Digest of Education statistics, List of 2007 Digest tables).

[6] The College Board, Trends in College Pricing, 2013-2014 Table 1a

The Community College Student Population

       Whether looking at standardized test scores, highest math course taken in high school or percentage taking or requiring remedial education, 2-year students (on average) are academically less prepared than their 4-year counterparts (McIntosh and Rouse, 2009). The following Table 1.3 illustrates some of the more conspicuous differences in background characteristics of students in 2-year compared to 4-year colleges.

Table 1.1 Some differences between students at 2-year and 4-year colleges

Student Characteristics	At 2-year college (95%= public)	At 4-year college (62%=public)
Ages between 18 to 24	52.4%	61.9%
Enrolled full time	40.8%	74.1%
Employed while enrolled	54.5%	34.7%
Hispanic	15.1%	8.2%
Black, non-Hispanic	13.9%	11.9%
Receiving any financial aid	62.3%	75.5%
With Algebra I as highest math completed	66%	18%
Takes remedial education in college	61%	30%

Source: *The Other College* (McIntosh and Rouse, 2009, p.5) [7]

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[7] Figures from the US Department of Education, 2007. using NCES definition which considers a student as persisting if he or she re-enrolled either full-time or part time for the fall semester following his or her first semester of college.

Earlier data had also suggested that community college students were less likely to be enrolled full time, less likely to be of traditional college going age; more likely to be a minority, to come from families of lower SES, and to be employed over 20 hours a week (Orfield, 1998) -- All characteristics associated with lower rates of baccalaureate attainment for students starting in four year college (Astin, 1975, 1977; Tinto, 1987; St. John, 2006).

Indeed community college students are at a greater risk for departure than their 4-year counterparts: of first-time, full-time students at 4-year institutions 78.7% will persist to their second year, compared to 60.8% of first-time, –full-time students will persist to their second year at a two-year college (NCES, 2011).

Table 1.2: Persistence of first-time full-time degree-seeking undergraduates National

Percentage of first-time undergraduates retained 2009-1001[8]	At 2-year college	At 4 year college
	60.8%	78.7%

(Center for Education Statistics, 2006,Table 346).

Moreover, the average rate of persistence at 4-year colleges is highly misleading as persistence rates conspicuously drop with decreasing institutional selectivity: at institutions where less than 25% of applicants are accepted, 95.3% of students persisted to their second year, while at open admission 4-year institutions 62.7% persisted. With respect to attainment the differences are more conspicuous: 60% percent of 4-year students earn a bachelor's degree within six years, while 31% of students attending 2-year community colleges will complete either a bachelor's *or* an associate's degree in the same amount of time (US Department of Education, 2007).

Beyond just attending classes, 2-year college students often have substantial work and family obligations. The decisions to take on debt versus working long hours are intertwined with decisions about *continuous enrollment* versus stop out (Proudfit, 2014). Many of the same variables associated with lower baccalaureate attainment (above) are also associated with continued enrollment rather than drop out or completion *after* 6 years for students starting in

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[8] Persistence is defined as re-enrollment in the fall. These percentages have remained pretty consistent since 2006.

two-year college (St. John, 2006). Students in two-year colleges tend to stay enrolled or to stop out and reenroll, even if they attain associate degrees in 6 years (Proudfit, 2014). Further, regression analyses using national longitudinal data with variables for social integration show that student aid and socio-economic background explain substantial variation in time to degree. These analyses raise serious questions about the applicability of social integration theories as they are currently conceptualized and measured, at least for community college students. If social integration is not related to time-to-degree in community colleges, which appears to be the case, we need a better framework.[9]

A powerful indicator that 2-year and 4-year educational contexts are not equivalent comes from data on baccalaureate aspirants from both institutions. Students who began their studies at a 2-year college were disproportionately unable to realize their aspirations compared to those who began at a 4 year college. Moreover, this aspirations- achievement `gap` between the two institutions cannot be explained entirely by differences in the students who attend them (Dougherty, 1992, 1994; Astin et al 1982; Anderson, 1984; Velez, 1983; Nunley-Breneman, 1988).

Efforts to quantify the effect of attending a two-year institution on baccalaureate aspirants found that those entering a community college were disadvantaged by *at least* 14.5% compared to those entering a *non-selective college*. That is, among students with similar backgrounds, controlling for demographics, parental income, and student ability (ACT), those who entered higher education by way of a community college were 14.5%[10] *less* likely to complete a bachelor's degree in nine years than those who began their college career at even a *non-selective* four-year university (Terry -Long & Kuralender, 2008)[11]. Finally, this 2-year college penalty is consistent with the finding whereby nine years after enrolling in a community college, only 26% of students who had intended to get a four-year degree actually ended up doing so (Terry -Long & Kuralender, 2008).

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[9] Proudfit's (2014) dissertation on initial time to degree for community college students was exploratory, in large part because the topic had not been studied previously!

[10] This, according to the study, was its *most* conservative estimate.

[11] Earlier research using control variables also supports the existence of a "baccalaureate gap" (Dougherty, 1992) in the educational attainment of four year and two year college students (Astin et al 1982; Anderson, 1984; Velez, 1983; Nunley Breneman, 1988)

Community Colleges as Complex Institutions

As a complex institution, community colleges have been studied in their own right and not simply as a foil for their 4-year counterpart. The community college is expected to attend to the vocational, continuing and transfer education needs of individuals, communities and now even students of other nationalities. They have been defined as "contradictory" (Dougherty, 1998; Labaree, 1997), often controversial (Dougherty, 1998). Proponents of community colleges tout their legacy of unprecedented "access", holding it up as the single "most effective democratizing agent in higher education" (Medsker, 1960, p. 4). Critics question such a simplistic reading of "access," pointing instead to the *low completion rates* of 2-year institutions and arguing that they are but, "a new form of tracking within higher education" (Pincus, 1980, p. 334).

Sociologists have also sought to comprehend the complexity of the two-year institution with theory. Perspectives range from the functionalist to critical social theories. On the one hand, patterns of student persistence and attainment reflect the community college's distinct function in society. According to Burton Clark (1960) (an early sociologist in the field of Higher Education) 2-year colleges help preserve the academic status of more selective 4-year one, "cooling out" ambitious but academically weak students, diverting them towards terminal sub-baccalaureate degrees, and relieving demand pressures on higher status institutions.

The effects of "cooling out" are not random. Instead, the mechanisms that have this effect disproportionately marginalize nonwhite and working class students. A 2013 report from The Century Foundation's Task Force on *Preventing Community Colleges from Becoming Separate and Unequal*[12] underscores the parallels between community colleges and pre *Brown v. Board of Education* era elementary and secondary schools, arguing that today`s community college reflect an altogether *separate* system of higher education for a conspicuously disproportionate number of poor, working class, and minority students. The report demonstrates how, compared to students at other types of institutions, community college students are grossly underfunded, that ultimately the 2-year and 4-year colleges are *separate* systems that are very far from equal.

From a neomarxist perspective (i.e. social critical vantage illuminating reproduction) community colleges do *not* resolve tensions between educational opportunity and educational

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[12] Entitled *Bridging the Higher Education Divide:* The Century Foundation's Task Force on Preventing Community Colleges from Becoming Separate and Unequal (2013)

excellence, but are a weapon of the capitalist classes (Karabel, 1972; Brint & Karabel, 1989).

Analyses of who enrolls in community colleges consistently find that these institutions have become the primary destination for low-income students (St. John, Daun-Barnett, & Moronski-Chapman, 2013). Community colleges thus are the bottom rung of an ostensibly meritocratic educational ladder (Perrucci & Wysong, 2006). With everyone capable of climbing to the rung they deserve, access to 2-year colleges legitimizes the class privileges and benefits the upper portions of the ladder confer (Karabel, 1972; Brint & Karabel, 1989).

Research on the transfer function of community colleges itself would seem to corroborate such a perspective as higher SES students with greater academic capital (St. John, Hu & Fischer, 2011) are most likely to take advantage of transfer opportunities (Dougherty & Kienzl, Velez & Javalgi, 1987, 2006; Lee and Frank, 1990; Dougherty, 1987, 1994; Whittaker and Pascarella, 1994), while minorities and women are least likely to do so (Grubb, 1991; Surette, 2001). Movement up the ladder thus reflects social position as much as (if not more than) academic ability.

Even describing 2-year colleges in terms of transfer vs. vocational pathways is problematic. And while 81.4% of community college students say they intend to transfer to a 4-year college this too is misleading. In his analysis of course taking behaviors of roughly 166, 000 first-time community college students, Peter Bahr (2010) found that students clustered into no less than six types. In addition to the *transfer and vocational* types, Bahr, isolated an additional 4 other enrollment patterns: *drop-in*, *noncredit*, *experimental*, and *exploratory*. It seems highly probable that an institutional/academic culture and climate composed of six separate enrollment pathways is likely to be decidedly different from educational institutions where but a single enrollment pattern can be assumed. In the following section, I examine the possibility that this institutional difference manifests itself in the teaching and learning situation of community colleges.

The Community College Teaching and Learning Situation

Researchers and theorists have begun to point to the uniqueness of the 2-year college's learning and teaching experience as a crucial link in students' academic success. In their report entitled, *The Other College,* economists McIntosh and Rouse (2009) framed the problem of community college persistence in terms of *psychic costs*. They suggested that a disproportionate

number of community college students were disempowered by their learning experiences. Extending a "human capital" perspective they argued that there were indirect or social-emotional *costs* to college enrollment that were "likely to be greater for those who have not previously acquired the skills necessary to study at the college level.[13]

A debilitating learning experience of students was also the focus of Cox's (2009a) research on introductory composition courses at a community college. She found that underneath the utilitarian language these students often used to describe their academic goals, lurked a strong desire *learn*, that they were not exactly the crassly credential-driven, students they often sounded like, nor were they exclusively concerned with the *exchange value* of knowledge alone. Instead, " … students typically began new courses with some sense of anticipation of the potential for *learning* something useful, important, or interesting from the experience." [my italics] (Cox, 2009b p. 371).

Cox's work then went on to show how a narrow definition of what students meant by "useful", coupled with instructors' own perceptions of the situation, created an instance of miscommunication that could frustrate teacher and student alike, with the latter coming to experience the course as just wanting to "get it over". Albeit from a sociological rather than a human capital/economic vantage, her work supports the existence of "psychic costs", (Rouse and McIntosh, 2009 p. 7)[14] and points to the relevance of student course experience for their college success. In addition, she described the profound anxieties and "fears" shared by many 2-year students who had, in spite of their checkered academic pasts, perilously embarked on college-level learning. Moreover, she noted that these students did so without even the certification of competence that institutional selectivity would have conferred, "… whereas admission to a selective college—or even one that is less selective—offers some indication that a student has the capacity to succeed at that school, even this tenuous assurance is not available to students who enter a college with an open-admissions policy" (Cox, 2009a p. 25).

Grubb and Associates' (1999) large-scale observational research of 257 classes at 994 community colleges evinced profound reservations about the quality of teaching many of these students received. Admittedly, they came across instances of exemplary teaching, and in their

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[13] A claim that is also supported by Cox's (2009) qualitative research, though supported from a decidedly different angle.

[14] As the term has tended to fall out of common usage within both economics and educational fields, from here on out I will use the more accepted term, "social-emotional costs"

analysis they indeed "saw everything" (Grubb and Associates, 1999, p. 61), but very much of what they saw, as they described in their book, was disappointing. Grubb argued that the notion of community colleges as "teaching institutions"[15] was both mantra and canard, that in reality they were "… less of a teaching college than a non-research institution" (Grubb and Associates, 1999, p. 9). Their research found an unmistakably "prevalent" (p. 61) form of teaching: the lecture/ discussion. Yet they singled out in particular what they called the "textbook driven class" (p. 62, p. 81) where the "instructor and students follow a textbook closely, often *slavishly*." (p.62) [my italics]. These courses were dominated by "teacher talk", had "little student-to-student interaction," and were forums where "metacognitive questions … were comparatively rare" (p.62). Ultimately, "these classes provided the most extreme examples of passive learning –contrary to the practices of those who believe in more meaning centered approaches" (Grubb and Associates, 1999, p. 62). This research suggested that the *social-emotional costs* of learning at a community college were not simply or simplistically related to the students' background, but also to the quality of the teaching they received.

What emerged from my own qualitative research of a single community college course was the significance of what it meant to be taking a *textbook driven class*. The idea of 2-year students paying higher, indirect, non-monetary costs is provocative. Yet my research approaches the issue of persistence differently, adopting a more semantic rather than strictly economic vantage. I drill down to the course content itself, so that I can be *equally* open to the social emotional costs of knowledge and to its more liberating and empowering social-emotional *benefits* (Friere, 1979). Cox`s work had begun to examine the student learning experiences at two 2-year colleges. It tends to frame student experiences in terms of their academic backgrounds, and the frames they come into their classes with. However, only by exploring how learning *and* teaching experiences are structured *in the classroom,* focusing on *actual* lessons, can we appreciate the symbolic tools offered (or not offered) to students and how differences in teaching might influence these interpretations and ultimately college success. Hence while Cox's work explored students to find out what it means to learn, my dissertation explores classrooms to find out what does the teaching mean.

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[15] A comment expressed by two of the three focal instructors, and the Dean of Students and Interim Dean of Faculty whom I interviewed as part of my research.

Study Approach

Consequently my research examined community college classrooms to obtain *an in-depth and integrated understanding of the course taking experience*. I view the process of 'staying the course', of completing assignments, attending class, and more importantly, of learning, to be an integral part of persistence. The study was exploratory and preliminary in nature. -- If we are to explain such problems as time to degree for two-year college students, or the likelihood of community college stop-out, we will likely need to re-theorize college student persistence. To better understand why some community college students persist where others do not, I have sought a fine-grained, contextualized understanding of their actual teaching and learning experiences in the classroom.

Perspective on Qualitative Classroom Research

I used qualitative methods along with a decidedly naturalistic orientation to the research to obtain such fine-grained contextualized understandings. I approached the research as a study of real world situations as they unfolded naturally, adopting a non-manipulative and non-controlling openness to whatever emerged, and without predetermined constraints on the findings (Patton, 2002). Indeed, in light of academic integration's concern for matters *other* than teaching and learning (above), and without knowing what in the teaching and learning experience might be relevant to persistence, it was important to cast a wide methodological net.

The research was constructed as a multi-case study of the *course-taking* experience at a New England community college. I examined *three* cases of *teaching and taking of Introductory Sociology* (or *Principles of Sociology 101)*. Each case was associated with a different instructor. Each instructor was ostensibly teaching the same introductory sociology course, in the same department*,* using the same textbook, during the same term.

For this research I was a participant-observer, assuming the role of student to observe and experience the teaching and learning during the course, as well as to reflect on the persistence process. I interviewed students and instructors, asking them how they experienced the classes they shared. The level of detail necessary for my analysis depended primarily on collecting *verbal* data for each case.

The analyses rely on verbal data (or discourse analysis) as a *contextual* endeavor that entails the collection of data 'around' a particular discourse event of interest in the classroom or the collection of 'probably relevant intertexts' (Lemke, 1998, p.3). The meaning of any text or discourse event always depends on how we connect it to some (and not other) texts and events (intertextuality). This perspective not only makes verbal data out of naturally occurring speech but places such speech in context within, "an ever widening set of factors that accompany language in use...[the] material setting, the people present (...what they know and believe) the language that comes before and after a given utterance, the social relationships of the people involved, and their ethnic factors" (Gee, 2005, p.57)

In particular, my own participation over the course of the semester provided contextual information of interviews with instructors and students. The transcribed lectures from actual lessons were also compared to the textbook from which those lectures had originated. Together these contextualize analyses of teaching and learning of content of sociology. Hence this research demonstrates the learning experiences of students *indirectly*, by placing them within a series of contexts: the context of *who* is teaching, *how* they teach it, *what* is taught, and *where*.

I take teaching to be instances of humans going about producing symbolic structures for one another (Brice-Heath & Street, 2008), or in decidedly more educationist terms, I take the social sciences (like any other curricular content) as providing its students with a set of linguistic/cultural/cognitive tools (Vygotsky, 1978) or forms of understanding (Egan, 1997). My dissertation examines how key classroom-based "tools" (e.g. their instructor, the lessons, and their assigned textbook)[16] afforded students (or did not afford students) the opportunity to construct introductory sociology meanings and ultimately conjectures on its implications for persistence among 2 year college students.

In sum, I conducted fieldwork in the community college to reveal the cultural/verbal meanings exchanged and offered when learning social science content. This exploration yields a robust description of the course-taking experience. We see how cognitive/sociological tools

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[16] Another important, but back grounded, element of the classroom experience was the students' own lives. This too has been addressed in this research, and appears as an appendix in the dissertation. Placing student course perspectives in the context of their lives provides a compelling vantage on their possibilities for persistence and insight into the quality of the learning opportunities they've been granted.

offered during a course could empower (Payne, 2005)[17] a student and motivate him or her to persist. Alternatively, broken promises or a failure to demonstrate the cognitive utility of such tools (much less demonstrate their mastery) could be dispiriting. This dissertation research describes and analyzes the contexts (largely verbal, though not exclusively) within which these cognitive tools[18] are offered, the nature of these cognitive tools themselves and their possible connections to dominant persistence theory.

The use of qualitative methods in the study of persistence reflects my broadest goal of exploring it as a *situated* phenomenon. I am concerned that the dominant *transcendent* models we employ to study persistence condition our intuitions about it. My data was "gathered" using what Abbot calls *ethnography*, a form of research that relies on "personal interaction" (Abbott, 2004, p.14). Essentially, for this project I interact with instructors, students and the courses that bring us all together.   I suggest this contrasts with the impetus behind much higher education research that has sought instead "to separate more and more clearly, the effects of different potential interventions or causes from one another" (Abbott, 2004, p. 28).

I seek instead to develop a *semantic program* of research[19], one that "explains the world of social *particulars* by assimilating it to more and more general patterns, searching for regularities over time or across social space" (Abbott, 2004, p. 28) [my italics]. Methodologically, I attended to what emerged as *significant* in this course experience, positioning myself so as to better comprehend what might *intellectually* empower a student to persist, or take away his or her commitment[20] for doing so. Towards this end, my dissertation examines the community college learning experience, *by focusing on the actual teaching assumed to foster it[21]*. I endeavored to assume little, to describe specific teaching events in

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[17] While there are very many uses and interpretations of the term "empowerment", I have in mind here a usage originating in social work (particularly Canadian and British). In particular an approach to social work that strives to help clients by facilitating their capacity to see their own presenting problems through a social structural and critical perspective (Muallaly, 2006 ; Leornard, 1997).

[18] Just to be clear, these "tools" are not my constructs, but intellectual resources for the students.

[19] The semantic program of research in higher education is perhaps comparatively small, but inspirational (e.g. Attinasi, 1989; McDonough, 1997; Shaw, Valdez and Rhoads, 1999; Grubb, 1999; Cox, 2009).

[20] "Commitment" is the somewhat encompassing concept that mediates between a student's departure decision and his or her experience of integration. Other possible mediators for example are interest, utility, and perceived value.

[21] This is indeed a very important assumption as much of this dissertation rests on an exploration of this relationship.

context, in light of the type of college in which they occurred, the courses they were part of, and the instructors who orchestrated them.

My goal was to dig deeper into the *institutional experiences* then is usually called for when employing Tinto's theory, to drill down to the course taking experience in community college classroom. I do so by employing methods designed to uncover its cultural specificity. I did not carry forward assumptions about 4-year colleges and their students in my study of two-year colleges. I did not assume that college professors were interchangeable—either across colleges or within a specific two-year college. Nor did I assume that courses with the same name taught equivalent content. I focused on teaching and learning as aspects of a cultural process, and amenable to ethnographic inquiry within a single community college. Nonetheless, before describing my actual research questions I would like to describe two additional contexts within which my study of classrooms was situated: 1) The New England context and 2) The disciplinary context.

The Situated New England Context

In this research on college teaching and learning, I take disciplinary and New England contexts to be situated in community college classrooms. Specifically, students and instructors for this research were drawn from a single community college in the New England region -- a public, 2- year, open-access, associates granting institution. The state itself is home to 6 land-grant universities, a dominant public research-intensive University and a combined total of 82 other public 2-year and 4-year campuses. Yet public higher education in New England has been described as "beleaguered". In the shadows of the ivy-league, it is the independent sector that has historically dominated the region. Indeed public institutions make up only 51% of the total enrollment in the region. According to Higher Education historian Jana Nidiffer (2005), New England public Higher Education, because of the "dominance" of the independent sector, has always been "underappreciated … underfunded and undersupported" (Niddifer 2005, p. 311).

New England Community College (NECC) is typical for the region. Born of the second wave of community college expansion in the mid 60`s, it is located on a suburban campus just outside a small city. The student population in 2010 was just under 3, 000, approximately 60% of whom are enrolled part-time. Of the full -time, first-time, degree/certificate-seeking students the graduation rate was 11%. The institution has 144 part-time and 44 full-time instructors, of

which 17 have tenure, with most others on tenure tracks. In 2010, 32 % of the students received federal aid, with the average amount of aid being 6, 315 dollars. The college`s endowment is approximately 290, 000 dollars.

By contrast, just 4 miles down the road is a prestigious, highly selective, 4-year, private, liberal arts college, with an undergraduate population roughly equivalent in size to NECC's. This population also contains some 200 graduate students; 13% of the students here received federal aid, and the college employed 800% more full-time faculty than did NECC. Of particular note is the fact that this college had an endowment of 690 million dollars, with 35 % of its total revenue coming from returns on its investments, while at NECC only .07% comes from returns on investment, with most of its revenue coming from state government appropriations.

In addition to anticipating the significance of region, this research also anticipated obtaining disciplinary content as its verbal data. My research underscores how the instructors I observed were more than just lecturing; they were lecturing *about* something.

The Situated Disciplinary Context

This dissertation research is also situated in a disciplinary context. I suggest that discipline reflects one of the most complex dimensions of the college teaching and learning situation (CCSSE, 2008; Abbott, 2004).   It determines both the actual content to be learned, and has a profound influence on the work and identity of college faculty (Lattuca and Stark, 2009; Beecher and Trowler, 2001)[22].

I examine two layers of disciplinary influence. Onone level, there is the disciplinary background of the actual textbook author and his efforts to communicate the basics of the discipline to novices. His efforts premised on his own understanding of the nature of knowledge in the field and of how it should be taught. The second is the disciplinary backgrounds of the NECC instructors charged with translating the textbook for those same novices -- a textbook they may or may not have selected, representing a discipline they have differing degrees of familiarity with[23].

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[22] Moreover this research ultimately suggests that it determines the preferred pedagogy as well as the pedagogical hurdles to be surmounted.

[23] Community colleges, in their use of adjuncts are not always able to obtain an exact match between graduate training background of instructor and course taught. This was the case in my own research as only one of the three instructors had a doctorate in Sociology. Between the two others, one had

In higher education the effect of discipline has often been an independent variable to be statistically controlled rather than a thing to be examined in its own right. However, Becher's (1989) landmark study, *Academic Tribes and Territories,* was a critical departure for the field.[24] He examined academic disciplines as cultures and faculty as socialized by them. His interview-based research vividly attested to the significance of disciplinary cultures for the intellectual work of faculty. In his work, disciplinary cultures were *typed* and their characteristics elaborated.

Sociology for instance belonged to the 'soft-pure' disciplinary type (one of 4 possible types defined by the hard/soft and pure/applied distinctions (i.e. Biglan, 1973). Thus its knowledge was reiterative, holistic, concerned with particulars, qualities, and complication. It was also personal and value-laden. Such disciplines they noted were marked by disputes over the appropriate criteria for knowledge, as well as over the nature of verification and obsolescence. Soft-pure disciplines demonstrate a conspicuous lack of consensus about the significant questions to be addressed and about the expected outcomes of inquiry. Ultimately, they are largely believed to yield understandings and interpretations (Becher & Trowler, 2001).

Indeed since Becher and Trowler (2001)[25], higher education scholars have gone on to explore how these disciplinary types are related to variations in academic practices and beliefs. Neuman et al`s. (2002) review of instructional literature in Higher Education (using Beecher s modified Biglan (1973) categories) found that different disciplinary types were associated with different assumptions about how knowledge should be taught, and about what students should learn from it. For example, in teaching soft-pure disciplines such as Sociology, face-to-face classroom interactions were emphasized, as was tutorial teaching and the use of discussions and debates. Students learning in these fields were expected to demonstrate creativity in their thinking and a fluency of expression. By contrast, knowledge in `hard-pure` fields was understood as cumulative in nature. Teaching content was linear, straightforward and relatively non-controversial. Instructional methods were mainly mass lectures and problems-based

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undergraduate training in History and graduate level training in Theology, the other had undergraduate training in Sociology and doctoral level training in Social Policy.

[24] Becher (1989) modified Biglan's (1973) very popular and useful six-fold classification of disciplines and identified four categories: namely 'pure hard' and 'pure soft' and 'applied hard' and 'applied soft' on the basis of cultural and epistemological differences. The study has been foundational for subsequent examinations of the relationship between teaching and learning and discipline (e.g. Neuman et al, 2002; Lindholm-Ylanne, 2006). The book was re-edited in 2001 with Trowler.

[25] This was the second edition of this very popular work.

seminars. The focus of student learning in these fields was on fact retention and on the ability to solve logically structured problems[26].

Yet because Becher's research (1989, 2001) was conducted with faculty working at prestigious 4-year institutions, their glosses of academic fields perhaps reflects *dominant* epistemological and pedagogical perspectives. Because community colleges occupy the lowest rung in a highly stratified higher education sector (Perrucci & Wysong, 2006), whether the disciplinary distinctions and glosses isolated by Beecher and Trowler (2001) sufficiently reflect the instructors I observed and interviewed, is an open question.   In addition, fascinating though these descriptions may be, they reflect what Lemke (1998) called "potential curriculums", represented in textbooks for community college students and transformed into "learning" curriculums" by their instructors. Thus I take instructors and the textbooks they teach from as two of the most important influences on a students' encounter with a discipline's conceptual tools. My dissertation explores how this encounter is itself conditioned by the instiututional context within which it occurs.

Finally, following the tradition of Beecher and Trowler (2001) I take disciplines to be of super-ordinate influence. Specifically, I take disciplines as relevant to issues of *access* in higher education, itself usefully specified as *opportunities to learn* (Moss, 2008). Extending Cox's research I suggest that, students taking courses expected (or at one time had hoped) to emerge from them with categorically distinct bodies of knowledge. That is, categorically different disciplines reflect what students expect in the first place, and *who gets to have their disciplinary expectations met is a matter of social/educational justice*.

Till now I have discussed some of the more inspirational contexts that eventually led me to construct cases of community college teaching. However, these cases were actually constructed with respect to a set of research questions.

The Research Questions

Before listing what would become my final set of research questions, it is important to recognize that these questions evolved over the course of the project. A virtue of qualitative methods is its emergent quality, its capacity to adapt its focus to findings that emerge during the

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[26] `Applied-hard` and `applied-soft` disciplines were also distinguished and described in Neuman et al`s review (2002).

entire research process itself. For example, in the earliest stages of this project, I knew that I would conduct an in-depth examination of classrooms, but I had not appreciated just how focused on teaching this project would become, nor how focal the textbook was to the instructors' teaching. While I focused on teaching in the primary question, I also integrated students' voices into the analysis to help build a better understanding of the process.

Focuses on Instructors and Their Teaching

Ultimately, I *explored the ways that instructors and students made meanings out of an "introductory sociology" course, exploring specific dimensions of classroom experiences that are traditionally left out of persistence research and considering their implications for our ongoing efforts to understand persistence*. Hence I constructed three cases of teaching introductory sociology at a New England Community College.

I took teaching to have a form, to be situated, and to be undertaken for a purpose (Alexander, 2006). And following Alexander (2006), I took the "lesson" to be the elemental *form* of teaching. In order to understand the ways that instructors and students made meanings out of an "introductory sociology" course, I examined and compared lessons across three cases of teaching by dint of the following questions:

1) How do instructors' conceptualize their teaching situation in these community college classrooms?
2) How did the instructors introduce the teaching of course content on the first day of class?
3) How do the instructors approach the teaching of course content over the course of the semester? And what impressions do these approaches make upon a sample of students?
4) How does the sociology content communicated to students in lectures differ from the sociology content in their course textbook?

The first question suggests that if we are to understand the teaching and learning situation within the classroom, it is important to understand the beliefs and desires the instructors themselves espouse about their situation. The next question transitions from intention to action. It suggests that in a semester-long course the experience of the first day is special. Beyond

introductions and first impressions, it is where the terms and expectations for the semester are set, both with respect to the instructors' likely conduct and the disciplinary content they will deliver. Furthermore, how instructors approach the first day is both a response to experiences they've had with similar situations in the past and a clue to their hopes for the upcoming semester.   The next question moves from event to routine. It examines the routine teaching that defined the course as a whole. The answer emerges in part from my own participation, observations and collection of artifacts in the three courses over the semester, but also from examining student interviews associated with each course. These student interviews were a source of alternative perspectives in the construction of this course long vantage (see below, *Observing and Talking to Students*). The final question focused on the content itself. If the previous question endeavors to establish an image of routine teaching, the last question examines its relationship to what is taught. It entails a cross-case comparison of textbook use in one lesson— essentially it examines selections of text from the course textbook and analyzes how their instructors translated them into lectures.

Observing and Talking to Students

The *student experience* constitutes an important and complicated element of this research. On the one hand, there are my own efforts to take the role of student in the classroom – sitting at one of the classroom desks, attending to the meanings communicated in lessons over the course of an entire semester, on the other hand, there were my interviews with the students themselves.

Because of my long-term participation in the classroom, the students in this research were approached with a mindset more akin to fieldwork than to a case study.[27] Nonetheless, when interviewing students over the semester, I was struck by two related perceptions: 1) that I could find students who did not seem to share my image of the class and 2) that there appeared to be a wide range of attitudes towards the instructors.

These perceptions also forced me to realize that *educators* conducting fieldwork with *students* confront particular challenges. As *relative* "experts" on instruction (or perhaps even on the content itself), it is exceedingly difficult to appreciate the academic opinions of novices[28].

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[27] The research had started originally as fieldwork and with increasing experience in the field did it evolve into more of a case study.

[28] On matters of knowledge, learning and teaching, students who are *new* to college (or a discipline) can hold opinions that are difficult to reconcile with more experienced academics.

In order to appreciate such opinions I set out to make sure that they were represented in my accounts. In selecting the sample of students to represent in this dissertation, I was guided by a combination of two criteria: For each instructor I followed-up on student interviews that appeared to express conspicuously favorable attitudes towards the course, and ones that appeared to express conspicuously less favorable attitudes towards the same course. Secondly, I sought information rich examples of each (i.e. reflecting instances of "maximum variation" and "intensity sampling" respectively (Patton, 2002, p.243)[29]

Finally, all student quotations that appear in Chapter 6 were excerpted from an Appendix I created. While the quotations from Chapter 6 referred to student impressions of their courses, the Appendix is made up of larger student narratives built from my interviews of the students, and reflect their lives beyond just their roles as students. This additional context not only enriches their impressions but highlights many of the access and inequality dimensions of enrollment at a 2-year college that are a large part of studying the persistence phenomena in the first place.

The Dissertation's Organization

This dissertation or study explores the experience taking an introductory sociology course at a community college in New England. I do so principally by exploring how teaching was structured in the classroom. My narrative about college instruction is organized as a discussion and comparison of three cases, defined by three different instructors.

After chapters on the study's frameworks and Methods (Chapters 2 and 3 respectively), I examine what the instructors thought about teaching these classes (Chapter 4); then I examine how the instructors approached their very first day of class (Chapter 5); next I explore how they approached their courses over the semester, paying attention to a sample of students' own account of the teaching they experienced (Chapter 6). Next I focus on the lectures of two instructors whose courses were taught almost exclusively as *reproductions* of the textbook in

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[29] In an earlier phase of the analysis I had been concentrating on two students from each class: one with a favorable attitude and one with a relatively unfavorable attitude (along with a few students employed for context and the occasional warrant). When the analysis (and dissertation narrative) evolved to focus on the two instructors with 'invariant' lesson structures, the sampling strategy was not apparent in the final document.

class, examining how their lectures did or did not capture the portions in the textbook from which they were drawn (Chapter 7). Chapter 8 is a summary chapter and is followed by an appendix that elaborates on the lives of the students whose perspectives had been used to create this dissertation's narrative.[30]

While the narrative that emerges is one of teaching, it is very suggestive of the limits it in turn places on students' ability to learn. This narrative shows just *how* content presented to students can represent missed learning opportunities. Moreover, this research shows that teaching the social sciences at a 2-year college and employing an "encyclopedic textbook" (Hinch, 1988) can be uniquely challenging. *It suggests that these same textbooks (in some contexts) can be approached superficially, with students likely to learn that the social sciences (or at least sociology) do not significantly depart from 'common sense'.*

Ultimately, I suggest that in the community college context, student persistence stands to be influenced by an alternative form of academic integration: one I have called *intellectual engagement*. Like academic integration, intellectual engagement is the result of institutional interactions, but it depends not so much on rewarding experiences with faculty as on rewarding experiences with content (itself likely mediated by faculty and/or instructors). I argue that rewarding experiences emerge from courses where students have been provided with the cognitive *"tools"* (Vygotsky, 1978) of the discipline, with its characteristic "forms of understanding" (Egan, 2002). I also suggest that the degree to which these tools are used or observed by the students is related to how a course is taught. I suggest that if instructors approach their learning tasks *deeply*, not only are their students more likely to adopt a deep approach to their own studies, but deep approaches stand to augment their intellectual engagement, while an instructor's "surface" approach to course content, is not only likely to foster the adoption of a surface approach among the students, but to negatively influence their intellectual engagement, academic integration, as well, and ultimately dampen their persistence related goals and commitments.

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[30] The student perspectives on their course taking experiences used in the body of the dissertation were drawn from these more expanded accounts of their lives. While the Appendix is not essential to the argument of the dissertation, it provides a palpable sense of the student's lives, and is thus a very helpful context for their course-taking perspectives. In addition, this context is suggestive of persistence, and highlights the social justice dimension at stake in not providing community college students with "higher" education, or the "opportunity to learn" sociology.

Finally, I suggest that introductory social science courses may present particular challenges to both instructors and students alike. It may be more difficult to show social sciences novices (e.g. students of introductory sociology) how knowledge in the field differs from common sense, than to convince STEM field novices of the same difference, and yet a sense for a courses utility depends on recognizing its departure from common sense! Courses that fail to spark this recognition are essentially 'useless', something to be endured, and to "get-over" (Cox, 2009). Finally, among students whose commitments to the institution or to higher education were already attenuated, the influence of individual courses stands to be greater.

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

This chapter describes a set of conceptual terms and their interconnections that have been relevant to appreciating the data that emerged from this research. The tradition of research from which these terms have emerged is an important example of qualitative research that has sought to understand the variation both in the ways students approach their studies, as well as the variation in instructors' teaching approach.

Out of this "student learning" research has emerged an important distinction between *surface* and *deep* approaches. This chapter discusses both terms, then moves to a brief description of the distinction this research has made between teaching and/or learning *contexts* on the one hand and teaching and/or learning *situations* on the other. According to the model that emerges from this research, it is the interaction between *situations* and *contexts* that creates the individual experience of learning (or teaching in the case of instructors). Next I examine some of the salient constituents of a learning experience (i.e. conceptions of learning; approaches to learning) followed by some of the salient constituents of the teaching experience (i.e. conceptions of teaching; approaches to teaching). In addition to the analytical value that these terms provide in describing instructors and student experiences, the potential of linking the two into a single integrated model is particularly promising. Finally, I examine the philosophical rationale of a project that focuses on teaching and learning with the intention of informing the refinement of persistence theory.

Student Learning: Relational Studies Approach

Since this was an exploratory study examining dimensions of classroom experiences that have been left out of persistence research, I looked at experiences associated with both teachers and students. Nonetheless, interpreting the meaning of both students' and instructors' experiences in relation to each other proved a complicated matter. I was guided by a tradition of theory and empirical research in Higher Education that has gone by the unassuming names of "student learning" research (Entwistle, 2009) or "relational studies" (Prosser and Trigwell, 2002; Linder

and Kung, 2011). This work emerged out of largely phenomenographic research conducted by Saljo (1979) Marton & Saljo (1976, 1984), reviewed by Marton and Booth (1997).[31]

This tradition of research has spawned numerous concepts, categories and distinctions[32] that informed this study. While I did not start out using these conceptual tools as a conceptual frame, they became central as I began to interrogate and analyze an otherwise complex experiential realm.[33] With these concepts and distinctions in mind (and ready-at-hand) I was not rudderless in a sea of meanings when it came either to observing talk in the classrooms, or analyzing the verbal data that emerged from them. Using the constitutive concepts discussed below, I was sensitized to higher education related themes and focused with concepts that were pedagogically relevant.[34] This previous research not only resonated with what I was seeing in my fieldwork, but it helped to organize my case narratives and was the origins of several of my most important findings. Indeed perhaps no distinction was more important for my work than the distinction between *deep and surface* approaches to learning.

"Deep" and "Surface" Approaches to Learning.

"Student learning" research itself reflected a shift of focus in the research on teaching and learning in higher education: from a concern with universal learning processes to an interest in more *situated* units of analysis (Entwistle, 2009). One of the most significant concepts to emerge from this line of thinking and research was a student's *approach to learning*. The concept emerged from research with college students that were given a short academic text to

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[31] Patton (2002) categorizes the approach as phenomenological, stipulating that it shares with other similar approaches "… a focus on exploring how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness both individually and as shared meaning. This requires methodologically, carefully and thoroughly capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon—how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, makes sense of it, and talk about it with others. To gather such data, one must undertake in-depth interviews with people who have *directly* experienced the phenomenon of interest; that is, they have "lived experience" as opposed to secondhand experience" (Patton, 2002, p.102)

[32] It should be noted that, other than the original interview based on the phenomenographic work of Saljo (1979) for instance, much of this research emerges from questionnaire-based data. My own research is instead ethnographic (Abbott, 2004) and offers an alternative usage and elaborated understanding of these concepts.

[33] What becomes more obvious over the course of this research is that this tradition has allowed me to see how the community college and the textbook could together constitute a context; to see how instructors (in some contexts) are best understood as students, to interrelate teacher and student perspectives, and to begin interrogating the relationship between teaching outcomes and learning outcomes.

[34] That said, the appendix section is afforded more latitude in the direction its narratives can take in capturing the intersection between student lives and their course taking experiences..

read and told they would have to answer several questions about it afterwards (Marton & Saljo, 1984; Marton & Booth, (1997). Marton & Booth (1997) found that in spite of the variation in how students approached the task, it still reduced to *two* contrasting groups: one group of students approached their reading in an effort to understand the author's message for themselves, while the other concentrated on remembering the facts and details associated with what they expected to be questioned on. Both quantitative and qualitative research in this tradition (Biggs, 1987;1993; Marton and Booth, 1997; Tait & Entwistle, 1996[35]) has focused on two core concepts:

1) *Deep* as a transforming approach to learning, marked by active engagement in content leading to the elaboration of learning material framed by an intention to understand ideas for oneself, to seek personal understanding and there was

2) *Surface as* reproducing pedagogies, marked by routine memorization to reproduce aspects of the subject matter and framed by an intention is to cope with course requirements.

These two different ways of reading a text have solidified into qualitatively different *approaches to learning* or *studying*, with the crux of the difference between the two residing in the students' divergent intentions: one group intended to "reproduce" the material presented (i.e. the *surface* approach), while students in the other group sought to understand it for themselves and to "seek its meaning" adopting a *deep* approach (Entwistle, 2009 p. 36). In addition, a parallel yet non-phenomenographic and quantitative set of research studies distinguished these same two approaches but also isolated two of their constitutive components: *motive* and *strategy* (Biggs, 1987).

These two streams have since been synthesized (e.g. Ramsden, 1992; Marton and Booth, 1997) and not only have the two broad categories of approach been found to be meaningful across a variety of disciplines (e.g. Entwistle, 2009) but each was found to be related to different student learning outcomes (Marton & Booth; 1997). Students who adopted a *surface* approach

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[35] Later research established a third approach— An `achieving` or ` how strategic` approach to learning/studying was uncovered by Biggs (1979) and Ramsden (1979). All three approaches or intentions were associated with a different form of motivation: intrinsic (deep); extrinsic and fear of failure (surface) and need for achievement (strategic).

to learning were associated with inferior learning outcomes, while those who adopted a deep approach were associated with *superior* learning outcomes!

I had begun this research with a more inchoate sense that superior learning experiences could have positive implications for student persistence. And while the findings of this research are consistent with these beliefs, what I had not anticipated was the degree to which instructors themselves likely mediate this relationship. Specifically, my research uncovered that lectures given by instructors in *textbook driven classes* could often be seen as mirroring the textbook, but not all mirrors were created equal. Some mirrors were distorting. Several of my focal instructors gave lectures which suggested they had approached the textbook superficially, in much the same way that students can adopt a surface approach to their learning tasks. Differences between textbook and lecture may suggest that some instructors had adopted a surface *approach to learning* the text in the first place.

The Student-Learning Research Program

While the more mature and evolved student-learning research program anticipated a close connection between instructor and student approaches, this was not exactly anticipated initially (See Prosser and Trigwell, 2002; Trigwell, Prosser & Taylor, 1994; Trigwell & Prosser 1996, 1999; Trigwell, Prosser, Martin & Ramsden, 2005). Prosser and Trigwell (2002) described how the earlier work of Saljo (1979) on *approaches to learning* evolved into a 'student learning' model and research program,[36] organizing a good deal of student-perspective-related research material. This questionnaire based research was not observational, nor was derived from case studies, nonetheless it provides a set of articulated, analytical concepts I used to build an understanding of teaching and learning as an integrated and experiential domain.

The original model highlighted a set of salient and significant aspects that constituted a student's experience of a learning task (Appendix 5). In addition, the model describes a student's learning experience as constituted of *situations* within particular *contexts*. (It is important to note that this diagram is essentially a box within a box. The outer box refers to the teaching and the learning context; the inner box (in italics) refers to the students' situation).

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[36] Both the term *model* and *program* are used interchangeably in the literature.

When a student enters a context (the 'world' outside the inner box) the interaction between the student and this context constitutes a unique learning situation for this student, represented by the inner box and its constituents). The situation will be different for each student even though they may be in the same context (Prosser and Trigwell, 2002 p. 16)

As a model of student experiences, the notion of a *situation* here has a very specific meaning. It, "… is constituted in the interaction between the student and the context—including any other students studying the same subject, the teacher, the teacher and the milieu." (Prosser and Trigwell, 2002 p.16). Similarly, the context can also be variously defined. "We use context to describe the 'learning world' that does not include the student. It could be the teaching package prepared by the teachers or it could be the teaching. It could be the science laboratory or the engineering workplace" (Prosser and Trigwell, 2002 p.18)

With this model (Appendix 5) we can view any act of learning as an experience capable of being represented by "four aspects of awareness", each available to the student, some more foregrounded than others depending on the situation. Thus, surface and deep approaches to learning on the part of the student are not only related to outcomes but to several other salient aspects of their experience. These aspects of awareness were never meant to be exhaustive, but they were expected to be significant and determining. Since the original research efforts to empirically validate these relations, a variety of concepts have emerged that also examine learning from a student's perspective, each with "different explanatory breadths" (Entwsitle, 2009) -- from broader concepts like *orientations to learning*, *conceptions of knowledge* or *conceptions of learning*, to the more narrowly defined concepts such as *approaches to learning and studying* that focused on specific concrete learning tasks.

Conceptions of Learning: Initially, the research program sought to document the variation in these different concepts and to understand how they are interrelated. For example, one foundational effort was Saljo's (1979) research that reduced and arranged the variation in *conceptions of learning* to a series of 5 hierarchical categories:

1. Learning as the quantitative increase in knowledge
2. Learning as memorization

3. Learning as the acquisition of facts and procedures that can be retained and/or utilized in practice

4. Learning as the abstraction of meaning and

5. Learning as an interpretive process aimed at the understanding of reality[37]

Moreover, subsequent research showed that students' *conceptions of learning* were related to the *approaches to learning or studying* they employed (Marton & Saljo, 1976; Van Rossum, & Schenk, 1984; Biggs, 1987; Marton & Booth, 1997; Entwistle, 2001).

An Instructor's Version of the Student-Learning model. Prosser and Trigwell (2002) in addition to describing research on variation in and relations among aspects of a *student's* awareness (e.g. conceptions of learning, approaches to learning etc.) eventually research went on to describe how this same model could also make sense of an instructor's awareness or experience (See Appendix 6).

> "We hope to show that like students, the situation that university teachers find themselves in evokes certain prior experiences of teaching and learning, that they adopt certain approaches in relation to these evoked prior experiences and perceptions of their situation, and that these approaches relate to the way their students approach their learning." (Trigwell and Prosser 2002 p.142)

Conceptions of teaching. The study of 'teachers prior experience' or what has often been called conceptions of teaching has actually been a longstanding interest within Higher Education and certainly was not confined to the student learning/ relational studies framework. Research in this area has sought to categorize the variation in conceptions of teaching held by college instructors.[38] Of course these are largely experiential concepts and as such their very existence is controversial (e.g. Kane, 2002; Eley, 2006). Indeed different researchers make different ontological assumptions about the nature of conceptions themselves (Ackerlind, 2003).

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[37] Later work by Beaty, Dall"Alba and Marton (1989) have added a sixth conception of learning: "changing as a person".

[38] In Prosser and Trigwell's (2002) original, student learning/ relational studies models, where the teacher and the student perspectives were separated, *Conceptions of Teaching* fell under the category "teachers prior conceptions experience". In Trigwell's later diagram (2007) Figure 3, where the two perspectives are combined, he has focused the terminology, employing simply "Teacher's conception of teaching".

Yet research on conceptions of teaching represented an important shift in perspective within Higher Education -- from teachers' overt classroom management to more subtle and implicit aspects of teaching (Hativa, 2000).

Pratt et al (1992) represented an earlier effort to comprehend the variation in post-secondary instructors' educational beliefs and offered one of the rare explicit definitions of a *conception* itself:

"Conceptions are specific meanings attached to phenomena which then mediate our response to situations involving those phenomena. We form conceptions of virtually every aspect of our perceived world, and in so doing use those abstract representations to delimit something from, and relate it to, other aspects our world. In effect, we view the world through the lenses of our conceptions, interpreting and acting in accordance with our understanding of the world" (Pratt, 1992)

A myriad of other studies have also sought to comprehend the variation in college level instructors' conceptions of teaching (Fox, 1983; Menges & Rando, 1989; Dall''Alba, 1991; Dunkin, 1991; Dunkin & Precians, 1992; Gow & Kember, 1994; Kember, 1997 Pratt, 1992; Prosser et al, 1994; Samuelowiscz & Bain, 1991, 1992, 2001; Prosser & Trigwell, 1994). Moreover, reviews of this research have found "a high degree of commonality" across the different findings (Kember, 1997, Akerlind, 2003, Lattuca and Stark, 2009). Given the independent nature of the studies, the diverse range of countries, institutions and academics sampled, the consensus is striking. This research has isolated several key dimensions of variation in meaning that university instructors hold for teaching (Akerlind, 2003). In general, conceptions of teaching have been found to vary along two principal axes:

1. teaching as transmission of information vs. teaching as development of students conceptual understanding
2. a focus on the teachers and the content covered vs. a focus on students, their learning and development

This variation has been refined further still into several categories arranged in a continuum (See

Figure 1.3) (Kember and Gow, 1994; Kember 1997, Prosser, Trigwell & Taylor, 1994, and Latuca, & Stark, 2009). Kember`s review of the literature, in particular, (1997) established five separate conceptions of teaching ranging between a teacher-centered/content oriented pole on the one hand and a student-centered/learner oriented pole on the other. These poles (or orientations) then divided into two lower-order conceptions of teaching with an intervening/intermediary conception in the center (See Fig.2.1).

1. The *teacher/content* orientation side of the continuum is divided into two categories, teaching as imparting information and teaching as transferring structured knowledge.
2. The *student/learning* orientation side of the continuum is divided into notions of teaching as facilitating understanding and finally, teaching as conceptual change/ intellectual development[39].
3. Finally there was a transitional/intermediary category -- the *student/ teacher interaction/apprenticeship* conception of teaching

Figure 2.1: A Multiple-Level Categorization Model of Conceptions of Teaching
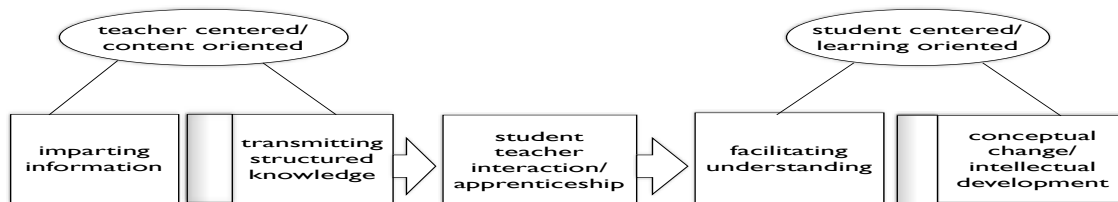
(Kember, 1997, p.264).

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[39] In a parallel set of empirical studies Trigwell, Prosser and Taylor (1994a, 1994b), also interpreted their sample of college level science instructors as ranging between a conception/approach pairs— at one end was the notion of teaching as information transfer (IT) and teacher focused (TF) at the other end of the spectrum is the notion of teaching as conceptual change (CC) and student focused (SF).

Though empirically derived, the continuum (like the one established for learning conceptions) is not pure description, but possesses a normative dimension as well. It describes a sequence of `conceptions` that progresses from more basic notions of teaching (i.e. imparting information) and culminates in a fifth and most sophisticated category (i.e. conceptual change/intellectual development)[40].

Research in this vein suggests that conceptions are relatively stable constructs that require effort to shift (Kember, 1997; Pratt & Assoc. 1998), and that movement between conceptions "needs the establishment of a sympathetic and supportive environment" if it is to occur at all. An alternative research stream suggests that conceptions are relational and the ones adopted by instructors are responses to different contexts or situations (e.g.. Samuelowiscz & Bain, 1992; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999). Whereas the former research strand conceives of conceptual categories as independent (e.g. Samuelowiscz & Bain, 1992 Kember, 1997; Pratt & Assoc., 1998) the latter views them as related in a hierarchy of inclusiveness or sophistication (e.g. Martin & Balla, 1991 Dall' Alba, 1991; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999).

Approaches to teaching. While *surface*, *deep* and *achieving*[41] approaches to learning are well-established concepts (Entwistle, 2001, 2009), an analogous set of *approaches to teaching* has been more difficult to define. Nonetheless Kember and Kwan's (1997) review of the literature research suggested 'approaches' range between two extremes: a content-centered approach on the one hand and a learning centered approach on the other.[42] Moreover, these extremes can also be defined according components very similar to the ones Biggs (1987) had isolated for student approaches.

Specifically, *approaches to teaching* were found to have (1) a motivational component (i.e. how best to motivate one`s students) and (2) a strategic component (i.e. how best to achieve one`s teaching goals). As depicted in Figure 2.2, the strategy component reduced further still into five separate dimensions:

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[40] In other literatures this is simply referred to as *Learner-Centered Teaching* (Weimer, 2002)

[41] This refers to a somewhat intermediary approach that was isolated in later research (Entwistle, 2000)

[42] Since then, variation in college instructors *approaches to teaching* has been understood as ranging between a content-*focused/information transmission* pole on the one hand, and a *student-focused/conceptual-change* pole on the (Kane, Sandretto & Heath, 2002; Entwistle, 2009).

1) Instructional technique,

2) Focus

3) Assessment

4) Accommodations made for student characteristics and

5) Sources of experience/knowledge.

Figure 2.2: Approaches to teaching

Teaching Approaches

Content-Centered		Learning-Centered
	MOTIVATION	
Emphasis on motivators extrinsic to lecturers teaching (e.g. syllabus, examinaitons, qualiificaitons.)	Motivator	Recognizing the motivating students is an instrinsic part of teaching role
	STRATEGY	
Lecturer supplying notes, examples, handouts, references etc.	Instruction	Lecturer encouraging students to discover and construct knowledge
More towards the whole class	Focus	Conscious attempt to deal with individual students both for academic and pastoral needs
Frequent tests and quizzes	Assessment	More flexible assessment often with choices
Treating the same or catering to weaknesses	Accomodation for student characteristics	Attempts to remediate student`s weaknesses
Lecturer giveing examples from own experience	Source of experience/ knowledge	Utilizing and respecting student experience

(Kember & Kwan, 2000, p. 485).

Relations between a student's experience of learning and an instructor's experience of teaching.

Kember and Gow's research (1994) established an early but significant connection between student and teacher experiences. Utilizing Biggs` Study Process Questionnaire or SPQ (1987) their research employed scales for measuring `deep` and `surface` approaches to learning.

They found that departments with more "passive" teaching orientations were associated with students that employed more "surface" level approaches to their learning and studying the course content.

Their work established that instructors' orientation to teaching (i.e. conceptions) was strongly related to students' approach to learning -- that departments with a *knowledge transmission* (i.e. passive) orientation to learning tended to discourage a use of "deep" approaches to study among its students, while departments with *learning facilitation* (i.e. active) orientations to teaching tended to discourage "surface" approaches to learning among the students. Similarly, Prosser and Trigwell (1999) found that university teachers whose orientation focused on their students and their learning tended to have students who focused *on meaning and understanding* in their studies. Alternatively, university teachers who focused on themselves and what they were doing tended to have students who focused on "*reproduction*" (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999).

These concerns and findings have evolved into a complex and integrated research agenda, with different researchers focusing on different relationships in a conjoint model of teacher and student experiences. [See Figure 2.3]

Figure 2.3 Integrated perspective of the 'student learning'/relational studies research program.
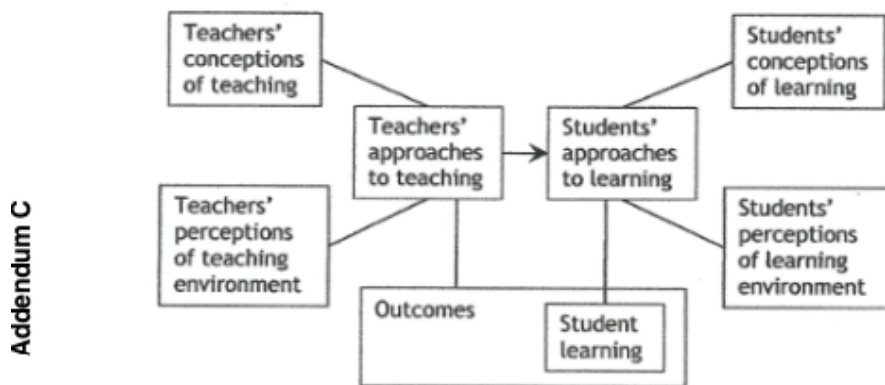
1 An outline mapping of relational studies for teaching and learning in higher education (Trigwell

(Trigwell (2007) in Linder and Kung (2011) p. 514).

The model provides a set of sensitizing concepts with which to understand teaching and learning situations, along with an analytically useful image of how they are interrelated [Figure 2.3]. For instance, recalling that Prosser and Trigwell (1999) suggested that the context within which teaching situations occur can be variously defined, it could be " … the teaching package prepared by the teachers or it could be the teaching … the science laboratory or the engineering workplace." Consequently I take the teaching context for my observations to have been both curricular *and* institutional. I take my focal instructors as interacting within a very specific curricular and institutional context, out which emerge unique teaching *situations* (Appendix 6).[43] Thus in light of these concepts, my dissertation explores teaching situations that emerge in the context of teaching introductory sociology with encyclopedic textbooks (Hinch, 1988) at a New England Community College.

This literature provided a provisional sense for the variation I was observing among the instructors. Moreover, when I compared portions of the instructors' lecture content with its textbook originals, I discovered that the surface/deep distinction was operating here too. However, instead of describing how students were approaching learning tasks, the distinction appeared also to aptly describe how these instructors were approaching their teaching tasks (i.e. lectures). Of the three instructors I observed, two led courses that were exclusively based on lecture, and those lectures almost exclusively drawn from the textbook. Analyzing the data, it appeared as if the teaching task and the learning/reading tasks were *intimately* connected: instructors would have to adopt an approach to learning the text book which they would then teach, and, in the case of these two instructors, their lecture content looked like the *surface* reading of students.

The student-learning model was not especially useful for developing a concrete image of teaching situations themselves, such as the ones provided in this dissertation. Yet it did suggest unanticipated sources for improving teaching quality (i.e. the instructors approach to learning!). Using the model we are reminded that a teaching/learning approach is not only related to an instructor's perception of their situation and to prior conceptions of teaching (to name but two of the four) but is also a function of context --- which in this case is the teaching of introductory

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[43] According to Hinch (1988) who as far as I can tell coined term (and its concomitant problem) 26 years ago, such textbooks "In each case, students are deluged with a sea of facts, figures, diagrams, charts and assorted bells and whistles. But does the presentation of facts etc. make for a good introduction to sociology and sociological explanation" (Hinch, 1988 p.2)

sociology with an encyclopedic textbook at a New England Community College. Ultimately, the model actually emphasizes the determining force of teaching contexts (and the perceptions of them) to teaching outcomes.

I see my work as a more holistic extension of this qualitative tradition of research in higher education providing an account that emerges from field work and case studies, and answering Robin Alexaander's (2006) call to create narratives of teaching in tertiary education that are more "recognizable."

> "… we are good at dissecting and atomizing teaching for the purposes of correlating the variables thereby revealed, but poor at reconstituting it as a coherent and recognizable set of events located in space and time (Alexander, R. p. 725)".

It is my hope that teaching situations, grasped as coherent recognizable wholes, offer up a rich tapestry of possibilities for connections between the teaching and learning experience and student success.

Philosophical foundations

I use two philosophical grounds for studying teaching and learning as a long-term means of better understanding persistence: (1) such theorizing is an "opportunity to save the phenomena" ((Baggini & Fossi, 2003, p. 122)[44] and (2) according to philosopher of science Larry Laudan, such conceptual work is the intellectual front of theoretical change and evolution.

By entering the community college classroom, not only are we able to observe persisting first-hand, but we can seek explanations of it that "save the phenomena"[45] of persistence. Instead of being reduced to a set of forces or variables we no longer recognize, I offer an account of the way things 'naturally` appear -- that persisting or going to college *is about taking specific courses, taught by specific instructors.* Yet as it stands we understand very little about the

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[44] 'Saving the phenomena' is a philosophical term of art (Baggini & Fossi, 2003, p. 122) which essentially means to reason in a manner that incorporates all of the observable aspects of the problem. Thus any model, regardless of how simple, or complex, must be congruent with all the available observations or data. We observe that persistence is, in addition to a social process, it is an intellectual enterprise -- at the very least, a long series of teaching and learning situations. It is reasonable to posit that a persistence process has a teaching and learning character as well.

significance of the classroom experience among persisting students: the place of course content in that experience, the influences of different instructors, much less, what difference it makes that these experiences take place at an open admissions-commuter institution.

Following philosopher of science Larry Laudan (1977), the quality of a theoretical solution has historically depended on the balance it struck between explaining *empirical* problems on the one hand and minimizing the *conceptual* problems it has generated on the other. According to Laudan, all theories solve empirical problems *but* they generate conceptual problems as well; these conceptual problems in turn are liabilities for the theory. I suggest that by uncoupling *persistence from* learning, and fragmenting the student's institutional experience, Tinto's theory inevitably generates its own set of enduring *conceptual* problems.

More technically stated, Laudan (1977; 1983; 1996) argued that conceptual problems arise for a theory when it "makes assumptions about the world that run counter to the other theories or to *prevailing metaphysical assumptions*, or when T [the theory] makes claims about the world which cannot be warranted by prevailing epistemic and methodological doctrine" (Laudan, 1996 p.79) [my italics]. I suggest that Tinto`s theory contradicts our prevailing metaphysical assumption that a college *persistence process* and a *learning process* would be deeply interwoven.[46] Using Laudan's logic as a foundation, I argue that to ignore the learning process in research on persistence uncouples the persistence process from the learning process making learning epiphenomenal[47] to persistence, inevitably creating a *conceptual* problem for Tinto`s theory.

In an experiential domain, to which access was restricted largely to verbal and observational data, the ideas described in this section constituted a set of concepts that sensitize me to the ontological possibilities around me, and they were an initial means for organizing my own perceptions. Finally, the philosophical rationale above provided the intellectual motivation for simultaneously entertaining teaching, learning and persistence ideas side by side. In the next chapter I examine the concrete, methodological steps I took to make this happen.

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[46] It's not that they cannot be analytically (and productively) distinguished; nonetheless, to the degree that we assume college is a learning enterprise, solving for college student persistence without learning in the equation creates a conceptual problem for the solution -- a site for intellectual and empirical work (i.e. research).

[47] Essentially making learning unrealistically secondary to persistence, and minimizing the importance of mental states to affect the world.

Chapter 3

Methods

To provide a richer appreciation of *the teaching of introductory sociology with encyclopedic textbooks at a* New England Community College I developed and analyzed 3 cases. Methodologist Robert Stake points out that "a case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied" (Stake, 1995 p. 435). A multi-case method simply "involves organizing the data by specific cases for in-depth study and comparison" (Patton, 2002, p. 447). In particular, I described the course taking experience -- the experience of taking *Principles of Sociology* at New England Community College in the fall semester of 2010.

In this chapter I describe the multi-case method that I employed. I will do so in the following sections: In the first section of this chapter I provide an overview of the study's design, next I elaborate on the construction of the three cases, thenI describe the different kinds of data sources employed to construct them. The subsequent section on Case Study Records describes how these sources then become data for analysis. Next I focus on the centrality of participant-observation methods for this study. The following section focuses on the special significance of student perspectives for this research. Finally, I provide an example of my efforts to compare data in this dissertation and comment on my efforts to ensure that such comparisons can be trusted. Attached to the end of this section is the set of interview protocols employed in this research.

Overview of Study Design

While this dissertation started out as an ethnographic study started of a *single* case, it quickly became clear that a comparison among the classes was much more interesting than a focus on any particular one.[48] Hence I began to compare teaching in two other classes for context, I realized that a multiple-case study was an appropriate method (Stake, 2006) for comparing teaching and learning across classes at a community college. Specifically, I examined Sociology101, *Principles of Sociology* as taught by three different instructors at a New England community college (or NECC). The purpose of this research was to explore the

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[48] The initial design entailed examining a single classroom and construct to construct it as a single case.

experience of taking a particular course at a particular 2-year institution, and to provide a holistic account of it.

As a multiple case-study the three cases of course taking experience were distinguished according to 3 different instructors:

- Case A: The experience of taking course X taught by Professor A
- Case B: The experience of taking course X taught by Professor B
- Case C: The experience of taking course X taught by Professor C

I sought to analyze verbal exchanges to discern features of the teaching and learning experiences that could be relevant to students' persistence in a sociology course. I used the questions below to explore the nature of teaching and learning in these community college classrooms, and ultimately employed observations, analysis of recorded lectures and interviews, and text analysis to answer them. Thus, each instructor and the actual sociology course they taught formed the basis of a case. Beyond examining each case, I sought to understand what more do we know about the questions (and the course taking experience) by virtue of looking at the cases side-by-side. My research of the cases focused on these 4 research questions (introduced in chapter 1 and restated below):

1) How do the instructors in these cases conceptualize their teaching situation in a community college context?
2) How do the instructors in these cases introduce the teaching of course content on the first day of class?
3) How do the instructors in these cases approach the teaching of course content over the course of the semester? And, what impressions do these approaches make upon a sample of students within these cases?
4) How does the sociology content communicated to students in lecture differ from the sociology content in their course textbook?

The analysis of data related to question one was drawn almost exclusively from my interviews of the instructors (Interview Protocols 3.2 and 3.4). To address the second question, I

used an in-depth examination of the first day of class, inevitably comprehended in light of having 'taken' the course myself. For the third question I relied heavily on both my participant observation throughout the term and the student interviews I had collected (Interview Protocols 3.2 and 3.4). The analysis of the fourth question compared portions of the instructors' actual lecture (from transcribed audio-recorded lessons) with the parts in the textbook from which they were drawn.[49] For the sake of focus, and also because the original intent of using a single case limited the data I gathered as part of the study design, only 2 cases were consulted to answer question 4. Nonetheless, these two cases, as the dissertation will show are apt comparisons in themselves and distinct from the third. While the third instructor was conspicuous in her efforts to communicate in an *academic register* (Schleppegrell, 2004) the other two were conspicuous (for reasons to be described) by their efforts instead to communicate in a *vernacular*.

Multi-Case Study Method

As a multi-case study, each case was selected because it seemed reasonable to assume that it would produce contrasting results, representing what Yin (2003) called a *theoretical replication*. To put it slightly differently, because of the variation I noted in the instructors' approaches to their teaching (See Chapter 1) and because instructors' *approaches to teaching* are related to their students' *approaches to learning* (Kember and Gow, 1994), we have good reason to expect differences among these cases. Moreover, as "replications" of course taking, a number of dimensions have been 'controlled' for, so to speak. The instructors were teaching the same course; it was taught as a regular day-course, within the same department using the same textbook, during the same semester. In addition to highlighting the community college context, this set-up underscored the influence of instructors and their classrooms on the course taking experience.

Selecting the Cases

There were five instructors teaching Sociology 101 that semester; I constructed cases around three of them. The selection of the instructors/cases was an instance of purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). My goal in selecting these instructors was to obtain the most

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[49] For reasons that will be discussed later (Chapter 7) lectures from 2 of the 3 instructors were compared.

information I could about the course-taking experience, yet I also wanted the context of the community college itself to play a significant role in my study of the cases. Consequently, I only selected instructors with substantial and longstanding ties to the college, who had taught sociology there many times before, and who were likely to continue doing so after I had departed. I did *not* want a sample of cases composed of part-time adjuncts, new to teaching at the college and who would likely not be teaching there the following semester. That is, I did not want to observe instructors whose connections to the college were relatively happenstance.

Of the five Sociology 101 instructors that term, four were part-time adjuncts, two of which were teaching at the college for the very first time, while the remaining two adjuncts had taught introductory sociology at the college numerous times in the past (with the minimum being for three years). I observed the latter two adjuncts [See Table 3.1 below]. The third instructor that I observed was the department's only full-time sociologist, who, not only had been teaching the course for 10 years, but who had also selected the textbook used by all the instructors.[50]

Table 3.1: *Principles of Sociology* classes taught at NECC, Fall 2010

Course type	Class on main campus	Instructor rank	Observed as part of research	Long term association w/ NECC
Daytime	**yes**	**Adjunct**	**yes**	**yes**
Daytime	**yes**	**Adjunct**	**yes**	**yes**
Daytime	**yes**	**Full**	**yes**	**yes**
Daytime (*)	No- branch	Adjunct	No	**yes**
Daytime (*)	**yes**	Full	No	**yes**
Evening	**yes**	Adjunct	No	No
Evening	**yes**	Adjunct	No	No
On-line (*)	No- virtual	Full	No	**yes**

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[50] It should be said that in spite of all my planning, and in spite of my initial impressions of the instructors, my sense of their relative strengths and weakness would change considerably over the course of the semester!

(*) Additional sections of the course taught by one of the observed instructors already observed for this research. Thus only the two adjunct evening instructors were *not* observed for this project.

Observations and interviews conducted within these three focal classrooms during the fall of 2010 represented those instructors who were experienced at teaching Introductory Sociology at NECC. Of the 5 instructors teaching that term, the two not observed were part-time adjuncts that had not taught at NECC before. Table 3.2 below identifies the three focal instructors (with pseudonyms) and provides some basic and preliminary distinctions among them and their classes.

Table 3.2: Profiles of Instructors

	Case A	**Case B**	**Case C**
Instructor	Sanders	Logan	Achebe
Position at college	Part time Adjunct	Part time Adjunct	Full time Professor
Class meeting time	M/W 11:00-12:20	M/W. 8:00-9:20	M/W 12:30-1:50
Original class enrollment	35	25	35
Final class Enrollment	31	30	29
Total women	23	23	23
Total men	8	7	6
Total African Americans	2	2	2

Between the three instructors they represented 60% of all *instructors* teaching Soc. 101 that term, and 75% of all Soc. 101 *courses* taught then too.   This coverage was not only representative of the term, but of the institution as well. Thus the three instructors selected were also instances of *typical case sampling* (Patton, 2002), typical of *Principles of Sociology* instruction at this New England community college.

Selecting the students

Though I tried to interview most students, many had very tight schedules, with work often scheduled just before or just after classes. It was impossible to find times to meet everyone. Some students remarked that they were interested in participating but simply had no additional time to meet. I tried to achieve as close to full coverage as I could in Professor Sander's class,[51] while collecting a smaller sample of students in the other two. That said, in all three cases several students dropped-out or joined the classes later.[52]   Nonetheless, the ones I have interviewed essentially persisted through to the end of the courses [See Table 3.3].

Multiple Data Sources

Case studies have been used in research on higher education for a half-century since the field emerged as such. Most of the early research in the field used cases to build understanding of colleges and universities as socially situated institutions undergoing change in culture (e.g. Baldrigde, 1971; Clark, 1971). More recently higher education researchers have used the case method in classroom research (McIntosh & Warren, 2013) as well as in policy related research (St. John & Daun-Barnett, 2012).   Case researchers examine multiple days' sources to "triangulate" as a method of using multiple sources to build an understanding of a problem. My case uses multiple forms of verbal data, classroom artifacts (e.g. syllabi, handouts, and tests), along with analyses of textbooks as sources for triangulation.

In order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the course-taking process, I triangulated across several data sources, and collected data using several different methods. Following Abbot's four-part division of basic methods in the social sciences, this project entailed gathering data via "ethnography", what he called " gathering data by personal interaction." (Abbott, 2004,

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[51] This was an artifice of having begun this research as a fieldwork intensive focus on Professor Sander's class. Upon adopting a multiple case study, and in light of limited time and resources, I decided to aim for maximal coverage in *one* of the courses while accepting smaller samples in the other two. His initial selection stemmed from both his enthusiasm for my research and his apparent willingness to act as my informant.

[52] It seemed that nobody kept precise records on the number of students who dropped out of a given course. Impressionistically, it appeared that about 3 students on average drop per class and about 2 students join later.

p.14). As part of this more overarching method and orientation to the research, I also gathered data through formal interviews and document analysis.

Typically case studies marry interviews along with an analysis of documents and other sources. As a method of triangulating my research questions in my research with students and teachers, I used interview analyses and other sources of verbal data to provide a basis for analyzing classroom artifacts, most significantly, the sociology textbook. This study uses the following sources of verbal data:

1) Transcripts of *interviews* with instructors
2) Transcripts of student interviews
3) Transcripts of *audio-recorded* lessons
4) Documents—excerpted from the course textbook.
5) Field notes and journal entries gathered as part of my course-long *participant observation.* The later were collected as jottings in a notebook while a select few were elaborated upon later as field notes.

Table 3.3: Primary data sources for cases

Audio-recorded data	**Professor Achebe**	**Professor Logan**	**Professor Sanders**
Lessons	N =16	N =12	N =13
Instructor Interviews	N =2	N =2	N =3
Student Interviews[53]	N =12	N =11	N =20

Each audio-recorded lesson was approximately 70 minutes long while the student interviews ranged from 35 minutes to 90 minutes long. Ultimately, in addition to a term`s worth of journal entries and notes, this research yielded close to 50 hours of recorded lectures and over

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[53] This total also includes students who were interviewed twice, essentially following them over the semester. The number of students followed per class were: Achebe n=3; Logan n=2; Sanders n=5.

40 hours of recorded interviews. Each of these audio recordings was managed and analyzed with the help of the Atlasti Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Software (i.e. CAQDAS)

In-depth semi-structured interviews were my primary means of understanding the instructors' perceptions of teaching [Figure 3.1 and 3.3] and my primary means of understanding the student's perceptions of the course [Figure 3.2 and 3.4][54]. Indeed, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2006), the major benefit of in-depth interviews is that they have the potential to capture a person's perspective of an event or experience.

I conducted formal interviews of each instructor during the first week of class. And while I made sure that I asked all of the questions on my interview guide [Figure 3.1] for the sake of depth, I usually did not suppress any tangents my subjects decided to take, and I felt at liberty to follow-up on any promising yet unanticipated leads. To help appreciate how the instructors` perceptions might also be dynamic (and reflecting a course that itself unfolded over time) I conducted at least one additional interview with each instructor later in the semester [Figure 3.4], usually after they handed back an assignment/test to the students. It should also be said that I had numerous informal conversations with the instructors, usually after class, most of which were recorded in my field journal as aides de memoire.

Similarly, in order to appreciate student perspectives, a small sample of students from each class was also interviewed during the semester. Most of the students that I formally interviewed were conducted with the first student interview guide [Figure 3.2]. A smaller subset of students was interviewed using the follow-up interview guide [Figure 3.4]. A smaller subset of students still was followed with a third interview. These were largely unstructured and used to re-take the pulse of the student so to speak, to ask essentially, 'what do you think of the course now?' Or, 'how are things going in general?' All of the student interviews were audio-recorded and some of their comments made in passing were jotted in my field journal for emphasis. The interview guides employed with students were not only designed to collect their impressions of the course, but to gain rapport and obtain contextual/biographical material that could better help us to understand them better as whole persons, with roles to fulfill other than just that of student.

Finally I believe that my commitment to gaining this other contextual information enhanced the quality of their reflection upon the course itself, making them somewhat less

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[54] It should be said that these interviews were designed and conducted not simply to gain information but to build rapport, to gain contextual knowledge, and ultimately to achieve insights that could only be gleaned from more substantial and friendly relations.

interested in managing their image and more interested in getting their story out.[55]   It should be
said that their stories have also been important to understanding the dimensions of inequality that
saturate the lives of community college students and appear in an Appendix 1 at the back of the
dissertation. Nonetheless, their impressions have been employed to help understand the variety
course taking experiences opened up by the instructor's teaching, and as both check and context
on my own observations. Again, the student impressions are excerpted from their 'stories', and
located within the body of the dissertation (i.e. Chapter 6), while the 'stories' themselves are
located in the Appendix.

Data from students

Student interviews were critical to this research. They were used to help reconstruct the
experience of being in these classrooms and to appreciate how students were (or were not
satisfied) with those experiences. I did not have either the time or the resources to interview
each and every student in the three classes (Achebe, n=29; Logan, n = 30; Sanders, n = 31).
Moreover, all students were not available all of the time, and so my efforts recruiting them were,
to a degree, determined by their availability.

Nonetheless I strived for maximal coverage in one of the three classes (Sanders, n= 17),
believing that experiencing a near-representative set of student interviews in one classroom
would make me sensitive to the range of opinions to be found individual classrooms more
generally. In addition, within each class it was possible to interview at least one student twice
over the course of the semester (Achebe, n=1; Logan, n = 2; Sanders, n = 3).   These students
provided a sense for how student perspectives could change (or remain constant) over the course
of the semester. Ultimately, the verbal data for this research was obtained from the following
total of student interviews obtained in this research project (Achebe, n=12; Logan, n = 11;
Sanders, n = 20).

In selecting which of these interviews to transcribe, I was guided by *intensity sampling*
and by *maximum variation sampling* (Patton, 2002). I listened to my audio-recorded interviews
seeking examples that offered robust and thoughtful descriptions of the course experience. Also,
once I recognized that wide ranges in student satisfaction were possible, I sought to document

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[55] Indeed many students wanted their real names to be employed in the dissertation. I did not oblige
them. However this suggests that many students saw the interviews as an opportunity to get 'their' story
'out there', to have meaningful, holistic, unbiased accounts of their perspective gain an audience.

these extremes. To the degree that both *intensity* and *variation* could be served simultaneously, I selected to those interviews to focus on.

Ultimately I transcribed the entire interviews for 10 students (Achebe, n=3; Logan, n = 2; Sanders, n = 5). In addition, elements were transcribed from 2 other students as well (Sanders =1; Logan =1). Consequently for this project, verbal data was obtained from 12 students. Nine of these transcripts were worked up into student accounts that are included in the appendix to the dissertation. In addition to the student experiences, these accounts contain elements of the students' own life-history that were uncovered during these interviews as well.

Document Review (textbooks and lectures)

Charmaz (2009) distinguishes between "elicited" and "extant" documents, both of which were collected for this project. Chief among the former were transcripts of lectures. These transcripts were compared to their extant sources in the textbook. A close comparative reading of the two kinds of documents was done in order to understand the difference between sociology as manifest in the textbook and the sociology as manifest in lecture. Specifically, topics from a chapter in the textbook were compared and contrasted to those same topics treated by the instructor in the classroom.

Field-notes. Field notes are one implication of the *personal approach* to data collection that Abbott (2004) referred too. That is, in addition to providing a fund of experiences necessary for describing my cases, participant observation (see below) was a source of field notes and observational data, the purpose of which was:

> " … to *describe* the setting that was observed, the activities that took place in that setting, the people who participated in those activities and the meanings of what was observed from the perspectives of those observed" (Patton, 2002 p. 262)."

In the classrooms I observed I would often jot down immediate impressions in a notebook, or sometimes type them directly into a note-taking program (i.e. SOHO notes).   Often they were "jottings" which I occasionally built up into "memos", some of which would ultimately become

"field-notes" (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995).[56] These notes were an inscription of my experiences and observations of what transpired in the classroom. Most of the jottings were memory aids, what I perceived at the time as being significant for helping me recall the lesson. Alternatively they were flashes of thematic 'insight' that seemed worthy of pursuing in the dissertation itself. Frequently I made note of contrasts among the classes, conspicuous moods that emerged, or the odd behavioral detail (i.e. issues concerning attendance, students sleeping or texting, drinking coffee etc.)[57].

Again, I conducted participant observation of three introductory sociology classes four days a week and had ongoing interactions with instructors and students alike. Taking the role of student, I sat at the back corner, following the lecture, taking notes, outwardly engaging the day`s lesson like a student. However, so as not to unduly influence the class, I largely refrained from answering questions, and on those rare occasions when group work was conducted, I participated but endeavored to be a minimal presence in my group. That said, at the beginning of the term I made a brief presentation to the classes, introducing myself, and my project. The presentation also made very brief mention of the fact that I was conducting qualitative research, what that entailed, and that my interest was in student persistence. Afterwards I entertained questions and handed out informed consent forms to the students.

Case Study Records

Recordings, transcripts, documents, field notes and journal entries were the principal data sources for this project. They were managed with the Atlasti computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (or CAQDAS). Each piece of data was entered as a separate file into the program. In this system, each file entered is referred to as a *primary document*, and every project they are a part of is called a *hermeneutic unit*.[58] The program also facilitates the coding of documents as well as the creation of memos,

The software also automatically assigns line numbers to the documents, and offers large margin besides every document for the coding. Consequently, all references to data in this

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[56] However not all of these jottings were later elaborated into more substantial notes, but they did nonetheless act as memory aids in recalling the events later.

[57] Not all lessons were recorded. My recollections of some of the lessons relied strictly on my field notes alone.

[58] A *hermeneutic unit* is simply what Atlasti calls the entire research project and its constituent *primary documents*.

dissertation are marked accordingly. For example (PD 3: 101-105), refers to *primary document* number three, and, to a specific piece of text located between lines 101 through 105. The software also permits its user to load audio files into the hermeneutic unit as primary documents (e.g. recorded interviews or lectures). Atalsti also allows for both the transcription of those audio files and for the 'mark-up' coding and manipulation of the transcripts, to be saved as additional primary documents linked to the original recording. Appendix 2 is the Case Study Record for this multiple-case study, and is a record of all the data sources that constitute the individual cases.

Key Dimensions of Analysis

All verbal data collected for this project was, following Patton (2002) subject to a "content analysis." The approach he suggests refers to "any qualitative data reduction and sense making effort that takes the volume of qualitative material and attempts identify core consistencies and meanings." (p. 453). Essentially, themes and insights emerged from comparing *data* with *data*, searching for similarities and differences in the process generating distinctions. By making these distinctions, and comparing them across cases, an analytic grasp of the data began to take form.

Indeed verbal data was read and re-read verifying that any themes unearthed were compatible with emerging wholes, that they were not aberrant readings or insignificant asides. In writing the narratival answers to the research questions that case data was also re-read so as not to exclude any significant and relevant themes that emerged from the interviews.[59] Finally, additional analytic grasp of the case data was achieved through comparisons across them.

The validity of the themes I isolated, or the claims I made, rested not only on my semester-long observations of the course, but by being able to triangulate across different data sources (e.g. interviews, field notes, recorded lessons, textbook samples). Following Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) I take triangulation to be "a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning" (p. 72). Claims or conclusions that emerged from my observations of the classrooms were either corroborated (or contextualized) by further claims made by the instructors, their

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[59] I was conscious of not being overly procrustean in my efforts to create such narrative wholes. I was mindful (of the possibility at least) that there might be themes that should not be incorporated into a larger narrative. I did not want to let a categorizing imperative overcome a sort of journalistic integrity.

students, or both. Similarly claims recorded in lecture were contextualized with excerpts from course textbook and student interviews.[60]

Participant Observation.

Perhaps the cardinal advantage of observational research is that it provides an opportunity to see things that usually escape the awareness of those in the setting itself (Patton, 2002). An additional advantage of making observations on-site is that one must rely less on prior conceptualizations of the setting. The close interpersonal proximity to one's subjects in observational research also influences the quality of the reflections and introspections one brings to the analysis.

Amidst the flood of stimuli associated with such proximity only a few things can be selected and inscribed for further interpretation. In my research, interpretation often relied on the course-long selective sedimentation of *un-inscribed* events that are, experience and memory. This has benefits and dangers as memory can help distil significance aw well as distort it. The grounds for my interpretations emerged from jottings in a field-diary (some of which were written up as field notes) and my own personal course-long experience, itself a series of successively recollected and reinterpreted events. However a reliance on jottings that were not elaborated shortly after each observation also risks interpretation being shaped by vague memories and generalizations informed by subsequent events. Consequently student interviews were the grounds upon which my representation of these courses experiences were constructed. My own participant observation, and the field diary entries associated with them, were the context for those interpretations.

A virtue of participant observation is that it strives to take a measure of a group's collective memory, akin to the "subliminal fund of impressions" described below.

> "Because [the observer] sees and hears the people he studies in many situations of the kind that normally occur for them rather than just in an isolated and formal interview he builds an ever growing fund of impressions, many of them at the subliminal level, which give him an extensive base for the interpretation and analytic use of any particular datum.

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[60] I have highlighted the use of interviews of students and instructors and documents associated with the textbook. Certainly other documents were obtained and other interviews recorded to create my own experience of this project (and its analysis). They are listed in the case study record.

This wealth of information and impressions sensitizes him to subtleties which might pass unnoticed in an interview and forces him to raise continually new and different questions, which he brings to and tries to answer in succeeding observations (Becker and Geer, 1970 in Patton p. 264).

That said, in spite of my best efforts to be impartial, I could not simply accept that all my interpretations were unassailable. As will become obvious below, I did not come to these experiences as a blank slate, nor derive my interpretations of them without predispositions. Consequently, the students' perceptions were a critical check on my own. Not only was I sensitive to the fact that students might not necessarily have the same perceptions as I did, but I sought these alternative perceptions within my data, and endeavored to incorporate them into both my account of the instructors and of the experience of taking the course. However, before discussing the important role that the students played in this dissertation, I discuss some of basic interpretive approaches I took to my data.

Participant Observation and the Holistic Perspective. Taking *Principles of Sociology* courses at NECC that Fall was a principal context for understanding the significance of any one element isolated for analysis. Course-long participant observation was an important source for possible narrative wholes, within which constituent themes could be weighed and set. That is, emerging wholes would help me to judge whether or not an element was a coherent element, or to what degree the whole must alter in order to accommodate it. Only with a sense for a particular narrative whole did a subset of themes emerge from of a sea of possibilities.

For example, I would likely have overlooked the religious basis of Professor Sander's teaching that emerged from my interviews with him (Chapter 4) had I not observed his approach to teaching itself – had I not observed his unswerving commitment to doing good work for his students, his efforts to tell them what would be on the tests so that they could score well, and his efforts to expand their worldly perspective with extracurricular knowledge (Chapter 6). His largely single minded pedagogical approach, his apparent concern for his students, in spite of their own growing dissatisfaction with him, helped me to see that his religious inspirations were perhaps even less influential than his religious-like practices, that his approach was as much preaching from the pulpit as it was teaching from the lectern. Moreover, without such an in-

depth appreciation of his teaching, its religious aspect would have been difficult to mention without caricature, or without making it appear overly influential.

Participant Observation and the comparative perspective. Similarly, the day-to-day observation of the courses, within a comparative frame, helped me to isolate the more routine dimensions of teaching practice associated with a class's collective memory, that would likely have remained invisible without this methodological perspective. For instance, the significance of Professor Achebe's use of a projector and slides, only really stood out in relief, when I saw how Sanders never used such an approach, or for that matter how he was himself exclusively tied to textbook and lectern. The two were significant in light of each other. Together they were significant in light of Logan's frequent chalk and blackboard work. And though she did not construct her lessons exclusively around this one instructional process (the way Achebe and Sanders had done), the appearance of chalk and blackboard to her lessons was *relatively* conspicuous.

While the comparative dimension helped to isolate the more routine and behavioral aspects of the teaching, other conclusions required multiples sources of observation. For example, my claim that the textbook was "marginal" to Achebe's course (Chapter 6) was based on: a) observations from multiple students that they did not need the textbook to succeed in the course; b) several students admitting to doing well in the course and to not reading the textbook; c) multiple students admitting that what all one really needed to do well in the course was to obtain "the notes"; d) Achebe's own admission in his interview about the importance of his notes; e) the observation that the text was rarely if ever referred to in class (contrasts especially with Sanders); f) admission of a student who had sold her textbook back but 3 weeks into the course; g) the admission of a different student who thought the exam questions only required common knowledge to be answered; and h) my own experience that is compatible with these different perspectives.

One of the most important parts of the analytic tool kit in this project was the comparative perspective that a multiple case project afforded. Emergent themes were compared across cases, sharpened and new findings pursued. For example, the monolithic image of all three instructors conducting a "textbook march" (Grubb et al 1998) begins to take on richer more contextualized meanings. Not all textbook marches were created equal. In comparing the cases we see that the instructors approached their textbooks differently. Moreover, while Achebe and

Sanders were prone to more surface readings of the textbook than Logan (Chapter 6), each was slightly different from the other (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5).

Integration of student perspectives

Though the students did not constitute their own chapter in the text, their interviews within the cases (e.g. Chapter 6) were a pivotal source of data. Not only did they help to contextualize the instructors' intentions (Chapter 4) and teaching (Chapter 5 and Chapter 6) they helped corroborate and contextualize my own claims. Exploring variation in student course perceptions was a crucial means of managing the biases I inevitably brought to this research[61] While I was able to use data obtained from students to substantiate my own perceptions and analyses, I also sought to represent all perceptions that were at odds with my own. In addition, I tried to conduct the interviews so as not to unduly influence my interviewee's perceptions. Finally, in selecting which students would represent the course, I approached them as a source for discrepant experiences. In an effort to counterbalance biases that might manifest at the level of the account itself, I felt it critical to include these discrepant experiences into my description of the case.

Specifically, as personal impressions formed over the course of the research I sought not only corroborating but disconfirming evidence within the corpus of student interviews. Instances of both were transcribed and their transcriptions became separate primary documents in my Atlasti project. Moreover, after having established that a particular viewpoint does indeed exist, I then sought students who represented alternative viewpoints and transcribed their responses as well. In addition, once my analyses were completed and a first draft of the chapters had been written, I revisited the student interviews to see if the impression generated in my account remained congruent with the diversity of student interviews I had collected. Finally, in constructing the account itself, I paid particular attention to those students with whom I had conducted multiple interviews. This not only provided a sense for the course as a process, but acted as a check on strong conclusions I may have drawn simply on the basis of a single student observation made at a single time point.

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[61] For example, I may have had reservations about Professor Achebe's translated portions of the Sociology textbook into lecture, and, a minority of students would seem to have concurred. However, in addition to laying out my own case, it was important to include the voices of students who did not evince such reservations.

Illustration of Compared Data Sources.

As a matter of method, the course-long experience in the classroom (coupled with one's own biases) created a series of nagging concerns, some of which became questions to be followed up in research. Interrogating the data collected established whether or not such initial intuitions might ultimately prove sustainable or insupportable. This interrogation evolved through an iterative process of triangulation and contextualization. I provide two examples below to illustrate this process.

Example 1: Cross-Checking Journal and Interviews

In light of my own familiarity with the course material and personal teaching experiences, I frequently experienced Achebe`s lectures as manifesting curious shortcomings. I questioned the uninterrupted flow of PowerPoint slides and was curious about the nature of the sociology that was being presented. Part of exploring this feeling entailed examining my field journal to see if these experiences resonated with something I had noted earlier? For example, a field diary entry for a Professor Achebe's lecture on Sexuality dated 7/10/2010 read,

> "This class feels like a series of assertions, not claims not arguments. It`s like he is a walking dictionary. He paces back and forth, mostly in front of the class, occasionally down a few of the aisles, always telling the students how the world **is**. He says very little about how **sociology sees the world**. . . (Later in the same class he says) "… religiously, sexually, and politically conservatives *are* more homophobic" --why can`t he at least say, `are more *likely* homophobic`? Something, at least, to put it back into Sociology. I will have to check back with the text on this one". [Field Diary 10/7/10 [PD 161 12][62]

Looking to compare "data with data," I read through my notes for additional corroboration. Perhaps another field note (from a different lesson) reached a similar conclusion?[63]

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[62] Notes from my field diary were often impressionistic, knee-jerk reactions to some sort of stimulus, and inevitably shot through with my own beliefs and values. Beyond responses, they were meant to be questions – opportunities to question the reasons behind my response as well as the reasons for the stimulus itself.

[63] It should also be noted that after these analyses were finished I also re-listened to *all* student impressions of their courses, and with the benefit of additional hindsight and a re-visitation of all student voices collected, verified that my descriptions of the course taking experience were not a caricature of what transpired.

I recalled relevant interviews with Betsy and examined her transcript in greater detail. Indeed her perceptions offered an additional piece of data to corroborate my own experience. I caught up with Betsy after the course had just finished and within a wide-ranging conversation she described briefly how at one point she had decided to compare some of what Professor Achebe was saying in lecture to what was in the text:

> Betsy: So then I would take them [Achebe`s notes/slides]. Go back, and like reference them to the book. And see how the book was explaining them versus his explanations and things.

> Me: And what did you find?

> Betsy: I thought that his slides were, umm, like, over, I don`t know how to explain this, um, like kind of overly simplifying things. And sometimes he doesn`t even, sometimes I felt that he takes things like too literally. Like when I would ask questions, and I would ask `ok, so is it this, or this? He was like, `well, the book says this`. But that`s, the book is even not explaining it. Or not explaining it in, uh, you know, in real terms ... *And sometimes I just think that he reads things and then (pausing for effect) that`s it! Like there! But he doesn`t process it. So he might just be telling you what it says, but not what it means necessarily.* [my *italics*] [PD 162 43-48]

Thus my experiences of the moment are triangulated with the inscribed experiences from earlier in the course and with the student interview.

Having established that I am not the only one who was experiencing a problem with the sociology presented, I also needed to contextualize Betsy. This part of the account was ultimately located in the appendix to the dissertation[64]. However, I also contextualized her opinion with those of her peers, in particular with those who saw Achebe and his class differently. Consequently I also presented Aaron's opinion:

> "I love the professor, Mr. Achebe. He's hilarious. ... It's just, going off topic

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[64] Not only was Betsy's perspective a minority perspective, but the amount of direction, academic capital and inclination to approach her learning "deeply" set her apart from many of her peers. These dimensions are discussed more thoroughly however the Appendix.

sometimes. Is kind of like all right. For the most part, it's just fun to see his life experiences, whether they are true or not. Just how he relates his culture to ours. He can bring a lot to the plate just because he's from a different society. There's a lot of interesting things about him. So he can bring a lot of entertaining, a lot of interest. Just from that fact". [PD 163: 44-51]

To correct for my own biases not only were alternative perspectives (such as Aaron's) sought, but after dissertation's analyses had been completed, I re-revisited all recorded student interviews to see to see if, with the benefit of additional hindsight, my descriptions of the course taking experience had ultimately produced a caricature of what transpired. On the other hand, although my own experience of the course was more closely aligned to Betsy's, her perspective did not appear to represent the dominant opinion of the course! Nevertheless, a strength of participant observation, immersion in the field is that it often elicits both dominant *and* more emergent perspectives. Finally it was through a triangulation of perceptions, my own and several students that I have sought to convey the course taking experience.

Example 2: Comparing Transcripts from Lectures to the Textbook.

In an effort to triangulate on the sociology that constituted the course taking experience, I compare the sociology as it is inscribed in the text, with its reinterpretation as lecture (Chapter 7). While I had many audio-recorded lessons to choose from, I did not have every lesson from every instructor. I transcribed lessons from only those lectures where I had recordings from all three instructors.[65] Consequently, not only could a sample of lecture topics be compared across cases, but how these topics were articulated in lecture could be compared with how they were articulated in the textbook.   These comparisons in turn also helped contextualize the variation in experiences within a given course.

For example I examined Sanders' transition to a new topic in the textbook entitled, 'Agents of socialization'. As the sequence of topics in the textbook mirrored those in lecture, coupled with the frequent use of the same words and phrases, determining the textbook origins

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[65] I was also concerned to focus on lessons that would evince the subtlety and power of sociological thinking—the difference between an everyday term and its elaborated and structured meaning as a sociological/ scientific term.

for any portion of lecture was straightforward. Underneath the topic heading "Agents of socialization" the textbook began:

> "Every *social experience* we have affects us in at least a small way. However, several *familiar settings* have special importance to the socialization process. Among them are the family, the school, the peer group, and the mass media." 79 [my italics]

However in Chapter 7 I show Sanders addressed this same content without making reference to the term 'agent of socialization'. And, whereas the textbook sought to present family, school, peer group and the mass media, as a special, finite, sequence of experiences associated with "familiar settings", Sanders presented them as "variables" drawn from a presumably infinite set. For instance, his own lecture on the topic began:[66]

> 001   "Now, there are, you know, conditions here and possibilities, and we'll look at some of those *variables*, that can change, in a bit ... they are kind of developed a bit more down here.

This portion of the dissertation followed up on Sander's use of the word "variable", and tried to show how what had been described *qualitatively* in the textbook was represented in lecture as a matter of *quantitative* differences. Indeed looking further on in the same lecture Sanders notes,

> 008   There are other *variables* that can impact that too on page 80, you know; *race* and *class*, you know, those … those things, you know … have a *variation* here as well.

By comparing the textbook to the lecture, I show how the "special importance" of family, school, peer group and mass media argued for in the textbook (see above) are deprived of special

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[66] Again, the parts underlined are taken directly from the text. The quoted portion is mostly a unitary portion of the lecture, except between lines 008 and 009. Between the two an anecdote was recounted. However, after it was completed the lecture returned to agents of socialization resuming with 'the peer group'. The entire section is located at PD 038-040 then skips PD 038-040 052 for line 009].

importance in lecture. Mediating on this difference is one of the principal goals of Chapter 7. Indeed the dissertation as a whole suggests that these departures from the textbook are neither arbitrary nor idiosyncratic. They reflect not just a surface reading of the textbook, but a challenge to teaching the social sciences in general and a potential factor in community college student persistence.

Trustworthiness

As I mentioned above, it is important to recognize that I do not come to this project as a blank slate. Rather, I come as one who has already had substantial graduate level training in the social sciences (i.e. Cultural Anthropology) and as someone who had taught a variety of social science classes within a variety of institutional contexts, including: anthropology classes at a community college; graduate level sociology-based social work classes, as well as psychology, communications, anthropology and social theory classes at a public research university. Consequently, I approached instructors and students alike not only with enthusiasm for the social sciences but with experience in both roles as well.

Indeed, it was likely a bias in favor of classes that look more like free-flowing seminars than one-way lectures, which caused me to be surprised by the paucity of interaction in the classrooms, and to shift my interest from a single case focus to a multi-case design[67].

My interest in Sociology was largely as a case of the social sciences, where the distinction between what Vygotsky (1978) called "everyday" and "scientific" terms were not as conspicuous as say in the natural and the physical sciences, or where the differences, following Schleppegrell (2004), between "academic register" and "vernacular" do not appear so pronounced.   Indeed textbook topics such as, "the family", "groups", "organizations" or "socialization" are terms of everyday discourse as much as they are elements of "content knowledge" (Alexander, Schallert and Hare, 1991) or areas of academic expertise.

Finally, in addition to having taught a course at a community college and having "taken courses" at one as well, one final (but more immediate) aspect of the context within which this project was conducted was the fact that I had piloted my observational techniques and interview

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[67] Both Nathan (2005) and Cox (2009) speak to the fact that many college instructors enter their classrooms with such a bias. I have endeavored to be mindful of the possibility that whatever `active-learning` is, it is also a shibboleth (Egan, 2002) that can constrain a researcher`s ability to recognize alternative perspectives on learning and teaching when they emerge in the field or from the data.

skills within another Introductory Sociology course at a different community college within the state system, as well as interviewed an instructor of Introductory Sociology at a "little-ivy" within the state as well.

As for NECC, since I was on campus 4-days a week, I could meet with the students in the library, cafeteria, and other locales that were convenient for them. Ironically, if not for my interviews being held in these locations, many students would never have known where these buildings were. The degree to which this occurred was somewhat of a surprise as the library and the cafeteria were the centerpieces of two separate buildings, in what was essentially a four building campus[68].

The fund of experiences from my course-long participant observation of these three classrooms is the foundation for this research. As I mentioned above, a critical piece to the validity of this project depends on the collection of data from multiple sources, so that the information from different sources can be compared through triangulation. Thus, claims were triangulated across interviews of instructors, semester long observations of the classroom, student perceptions and lecture transcripts. In addition, audio-recording many of the lessons afforded me the opportunity to "vicariously revisit" these original experiences long after they had occurred. [69] Again the most powerful lens for claims about course-taking and instruction (other than observing the instruction over the course of the entire semester) emerged from a comparison among cases.

As there are dimensions of this portrayal that can seem critical of instruction or instructors, it was important to locate claims made about an instructor, within a fuller context of the instructor as a person (Chapter 4), and of the teaching moment itself as irreducibly complex

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[68] Of course some students were more familiar with the different buildings and their functions than others. For instance, just outside of the cafeteria, I often met with a number of 'regulars` at a game room for a competitive game of foosball and banter. However, on the whole, the cafeteria and other non-classroom parts of the campus experience seemed more the domain of staff and faculty than for students. I tried to appreciate both classroom and its environs as best I could – Like everyone else at the cafeteria, I too came to recognize that when you paid for your meals at the cafeteria counter, you had to make sure you articulated each and everything you were purchasing to the woman at the register, and that when you paid her, you made sure to tell her exactly what bills you were giving her. Because she was blind, she needed to know your bills precisely if she was to arrange her drawer appropriately and avoid giving out the incorrect change. Like the college itself, transactions were occurring, but it was worthwhile to pay attention as to how they might have differed from what you may have anticipated.

[69] Erickson (1986) seems to have an audio-visual form of revisiting in mind as strategy for validity, and seems not so focused on a strictly audio form of revisiting. And while perhaps audio revisiting is not as rich as its audio visual counterparts, they are nonetheless rich and powerfully evocative of the circumstances in which they occurred.

and reflecting multiple realities (Chapter 5). In constructing the dissertation narrative I have sought to strike a balance between claims critical of instruction, with the instructor's own perspectives, as likely well intentioned agents, acting in complicated moments with often ironic implications.

Essentially I see analysis as a personal weighing of claims emerging from different sources of data, and using outside literature and traditions to help in that process. Claims are woven into themes, and the themes into an image. I root through data sources again, to see if the image still holds, comparing images across cases for greater definition and additional insights, while crafting accurate and respectful narratives in each case and the comparison of them.

Figure 3.1 --- Initial Instructor Interviews

1. How would you describe your approach to, or philosophy of teaching?
2. What are some of the key learning objectives you have for the students?
3. What do you see as some of the key obstacles to students achieving these objectives?
4. What do you think is hardest content for students to learn in this course?
5. Can the course you are teaching be described as a process? Explain.
6. How did the course you are teaching come to take its current form?
7. How does the fact that you are teaching at this college influence how you are able to teach?

Figure 3.2 --- Initial Student Interviews

1. What classes are you taking this term?
2. Where does this class rank for you amongst your others?
3. What program are you in?
4. How much of your program remains?
5. How long have you been at NECC?
6. Is this your first institution of higher education?
7. How did you come to choose this program?
8. How are you feeling about the class at the moment?
9. What do you like about it?
10. What do you not like about it?
11. So, what is your story? How did you come to be a student at NECC?
12. What kind of student were you in high school?
13. How does NECC fit into your short-term and your long-term plans?
14. What do you think contributes most to your success in this class?
15. What do you think is your biggest hurdle to succeeding in this class?
16. Do you think you were prepared to take this class?
17. What do you find most engaging about this class?
18. What influences how well you are able to engage in this class?
19. What do you think is the most important thing the instructor is doing for the class at the

moment?

20. What do you think is the most important thing going on in the classroom that the instructor does not seem to recognize?

21. What is your age and ethnicity?

22. Which readings stood out for you as particularly useful?

Figure 3.3 --- Subsequent Instructor Interviews (post-assignment)

1. What were your impressions of how the exam went?

2. What did you learn about the state of their learning? Your teaching?

3. What issues stood out as particularly difficult for the students?

4. How do you think the class is going so far?

5. How does this class compare to ones you have taught in the past?

Figure 3.4 --- Subsequent Student Interviews (post-assignment)

1. How did you do? [regarding exam/assignment]

2. Do you think the grade you received was a fair assessment of your work?

3. How did you prepare for this assignment?

4. How much time did it take.

5. Which question (s) did you find the most difficult? Explain.

     a. What happened on your lowest scored question?

6. What do you think was your greatest success in this assignment? Explain.

7. How does your work on this assignment/exam compare to the last?

8. How do you balance this class with your other responsibilities?

9. What is it about your life that explains this grade?

Chapter 4
Instructors' Conceptualizations
of Teaching Introductory Sociology

This chapter addresses the question: How do the instructors 'see' their teaching of these Sociology courses? What are their conceptualizations of teaching introductory sociology at NECC? The data was drawn largely from interviews with the instructors themselves, conducted at the very beginning of the semester. While instructor conceptualizations and actual teaching practices might not always mirror each other, they nonetheless are *indices* of an instructor's teaching and of a student's opportunity to learn. Given the centrality of *lecture* in these three classes, the instructors (and their textbooks) became the students' most important window into the discipline of sociology.[70] The instructors' conceptualizations ultimately provide provocative comparisons with this research's findings.

CASE ONE: PROFESSOR ACHEBE

I recall our first interview in his office; professor Achebe's disarmingly broad smile and crushing handshake left a lasting impression. And though our conversation centered on how he conceived of his teaching at NECC, he also seemed keen to ensure that both questions and answers be understood in light of concrete teaching and learning circumstances. He appeared skeptical of the capacity for such questioning to grasp his teaching, and suggested at the very least that his answers must be understood in their institutional context.

Do not assume this is a 4-year college

When we got to the formal part of the interview I has asked him directly, "So how would you describe your approach to teaching, or your philosophy of teaching?" (PD2:001). He suggested that while other instructors might be prone to talk about students abstractly he preferred to rely on his ability to "know" his students instead, "… the way I look at it is, I *prefer* to know my students …" [PD 2: 003]. What Professor Achebe meant by getting to know his students became evident over the course of our interview.

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[70] This is only to say that these three classes were fundamentally about a *single* instructor and a *single* book.

Continuing a conversation from just before the interview, where he had expressed that he "knew" when a student was serious or was not, I asked him how he could tell. I also asked if his teaching approach thus varied with different student motivations:

Me: "What about the seriousness of students? How does the lack of seriousness or seriousness of the student change your approach, or does it?

Achebe: "No! The seriousness of the students demands that you understand that this, you have to understand that this is a community college! And many community colleges have, work with students who are not going to be more serious than *you* suspect. In the sense that many of them have, tend to have, a carry-over from high school. You know, it's a lax atmosphere." [PD 2: 005-007].

He asserted that two-year college students were less likely than four year-college students to have left the less serious ways of high school behind them. Indeed, he was emphatic that a preponderance of students at NECC were either emotionally if not intellectually immature:

"There are students who don't want to be serious. They think it`s just a carryover from high school. As opposed to if you are in a four-year college … The reason why community college students are not that serious is because it [the two-year college] is a bridge. We look at it as a bridge to a four-year college. So, when that bridge is not well built, they [the students] are more likely to fall in the water, stumble, along the way. But there is nothing you are going to do to make the students more serious, unless you demand it. Demanding it, is one thing, and getting students to do it, is another thing [PD2: 007]."

Throughout the interview Achebe described the community college as a transitional institution -- a "bridge" between high school and the 4-year college. It was this *not-being-out-of-high-school-* quality that defined both the institution and its students.

Such students cannot use just any textbook. In addition to appreciating their lack seriousness, it was imperative for Achebe that research on teaching and learning at NECC

grasped that the academic abilities of community college students were not likely what one would assume.   He underscored this point by suggesting that there was a market for a remedial sociology textbook. Years ago Achebe recalled how he and a few "colleagues" had discussed the need for a sociology textbook designed specifically for the community college population:

"... And I can tell you when I started teaching here, I had even friends of mine already within the system, and I was discussing with them. I said 'is it possible for us to come up with a textbook in sociology that can be geared towards a community college'? Because the level of understanding at the community college is quite different from the level of understanding at a 4-year college (rapping hard with his knuckles on the table for emphasis)." [PD2: 182]."

The relative under-preparedness of the students was more than a claim Professor Achebe wanted to make, but one he wanted to *prove*. He argued that whether you look at SAT scores, GPA, or the level of remedial English class required, the students were inescapably underprepared:

"You have to understand that these people are not on the same level. If you look at their SAT scores, if you look at GP (presumably GPA) and so forth), if you look at some of them, you would be shocked! They are doing English 003. No Credit! Than from 003, they move to 063. No credit! Then to 073.[71] No credit! ...Yeah... Yeah... (as if responding to my incredulity). Their reading level is below. They cannot! So now tell me, you give them that textbook?" PD:2 229

Thus, the need of a special textbook for "these people" was evidenced by their *relative* illiteracy. Their literacy level was not only described with respect to 4-year students but also relative to Professor Achebe's own English abilities as a non-native English speaker!

"No, No, I mean, it`s shameful! For someone who says, 'Achebe does not know English.

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[71] There are 4 levels of non-credit remedial English courses, before Composition: Foundations of Reading; Writing Foundations; Writing: Introduction to the essay; and Academic Reading.

Achebe is not English speaking!' And yet you [the imagined student] go to school, you are taking 003! (knocking on the desk for emphasis) … what does that tell about you? It tells a lot about [you] … [that] you woke up one day, or grew up in a family, your mom, your dad speak English, the society speaks English, not Swahili, not Ebonics. English! English! And yet, when you go to school. You should be ashamed of yourself. Go to school, you are tested (knocking with knuckles again), and the level of the person testing you is [an] English speaking person. Not African! (knocking again) and he [an imagined tester] says your level of English is equivalent to, Kindergarten! Huh? (as if asking, what can one expect to achieve in such a context?)" [PD: 242]

In addition to lacking motivation or goals, Achebe believes it is "shameful" that a student could enter college and be placed in English 003. English 003, or *Foundations of Reading,* is the lowest level of English offered at NECC. Moreover the students' remedial level of literacy was apparent not simply with respect to Professor Achebe`s English language achievements, but more *objectively*, with respect to the series of non-credit, pre-100 level English courses many had to take before even being qualified to take their first college-level, credit-bearing English course, English 100, *Composition*.

Consequently Achebe's choice of textbook had to be perfect. He suggested that he had *not* in point of fact ultimately "settled on Macionis" but that it was "precisely" what he had been looking for in a textbook. However the problem he urged was even bigger than not being appropriate for 2-year college students -- some textbooks were simply too complex for *any* undergraduate *anywhere*.

"But then there are some textbooks that are too much complicated. If you read them, unless you have a Ph. D, like right now what you are aspiring to get, you may not be able to narrow down to what the person is saying …" [PD2: 186]."

Thus there is a simplicity he is seeking for his textbooks, one that is obviated by authors who needlessly complicate matters. In referring to an author whose textbook he had just finished reviewing for a publisher he said,

"… the problem is, this person [the author] goes in circles, round and round. Something that he could explain in just in a few words, he goes round and round, beating around the bush … You don`t want to have a whole quagmire of whatever it is, web of ties, and here and there, for people to have to sift out to what`s the right word here. What do I mean here? What? No!*"* [PD2: 200]."

By contrast, Achebe suggested that community college students required a firm hand, strong direction and concision. He described the intellectual exercise of understanding verbally complicated texts as if for the effete, needlessly embellishing and obscuring basic points:

"I think that sometimes you have to drive the point (*knocks hard with his knuckles on the table*) straight! This is what I mean! (*knocking again*). This is what it`s supposed to (knock), instead of having to go in circles and so forth.  For people who have done Masters or Bachelors degrees, hey, you can go round and round. Try to put *them* in that maze! You know. Yeah! Let them try to figure out. 'How do I get from this point to that point'.  Yeah! At least I`ve been given direction; you know what happens there is up to me (*imagining 4-year students etc.*). But those who you're trying to give a direction, they need to know! (*knock*) Precisely know (*knock*!), what you have to do!" [PD2: 200]."

Thus in the case of students without "direction" (i.e. community college students) concision is paramount.

Teaching as a Personal Mastery of Students

As noted above, Professor Achebe found questions addressing his beliefs about teaching to be too confining, if not misstated. He was reluctant to admit possessing any such *generalized* beliefs about teaching. Rather he suggested that his own pedagogy was better grasped by its focus on the particular and the personal. Again,

"There are several things that one has to look at when you are talking about philosophy of teaching. Some people are, what we call student-centered, other people may have different approaches to it. But the way I look at it is, I prefer to *know* my students, yeah

… " [PD 2: 003]. [72]

Roll call. While his use of the term "student-centered" demonstrated a familiarity with the discourse on college-teaching, he stipulated however that "knowing" his students was deeply related to the information he obtained from his "roll" call at the beginning of each class.

"… [W]hen I take my roll call, the idea is for me to figure out, to be able to place the student, and the name, and so forth, through their face. You can now be able to *master*. The way I come to know my students so well . . . you can tell who is a serious student, who is not a serious student. The moment it comes to your students, than you know how serious they are, how lax they are whatever it is an so forth"[73] [my italics] [PD 2: 003].

We will see below how knowing his students is closely tied to Achebe's assessment strategy, but as we see just noted above a significant aspect of this assessment strategy was also related to 'the roll'. Knowing his students was not necessarily reflected in his use (verbal or practical) of an academic discourse, but rather on acquiring the tacit information embedded in his interaction with them. Finally, I suggest that Achebe's authoritative tone and emphasis on mastering student names was loosely identified with being a master-teacher[74].

It's not what I believe; it's what I do. Achebe reframed questions about his teaching *beliefs* with responses in terms of his teaching *practices*.[75] And though he alluded to expertise in academic discourses about college teaching, his own "approach" he suggested transcends such discourses. Although he was not inclined to admit of possessing any one particular teaching orientation, he did point out that an instructor at NECC should adopt a "flexible" approach (see below). He made several claims about how he first must understand his students then teach to

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[72] This notation refers to the location in my Atlas.ti database of a particular piece of verbal data. The first number refers to "primary document; the second to "line number".

[73] Because English is not Achebe`s mother tongue, his syntax and grammar can seem awkward. This is particularly true when it has been audio-recorded and transcribed. This situation does nonetheless highlight the importance of context and other non-discursive channels for understanding the meaning of his messages. That said, I believe an unadulterated transcription is nonetheless comprehensible, if it does perhaps make him sound more opaque than he was experienced at the time.

[74] I also suggest that this emphasis entails a mastery over students – one that Cheeky-boy (Chapter Three) was reluctant to submit to. This claim I make somewhat more tentatively.

[75] "Mastering" student names not only forces students to say at least one word in class (e.g. "here" or "present"), it also gives Achebe the capacity to name his students *at will*.

their level. After stipulating the significance of the *roll call* he continued,

> "So I learn my students. I also try to figure out how best to approach my lectures in terms of preparations and so forth. So I prepare well, knowing that, yes, I am going in front of my students. I need to prepare. This is why sometimes I have an open policy whereby I give the students *notes* on the Internet, the "Blackboard,"[76] and also they can come to class and get it. So, it is a win-win situation. In the sense that the students who have not been there have access to the *notes* and will be able to be prepared for the exams and so forth. So my approach is to figure out, how can I be flexible, so that I meet the students, in the way they feel more comfortable." [PD2: 003]."

It became increasingly obvious over the course of the term that providing access to *the notes* was one of the most important aspects of his teaching, and that obtaining those notes was one of the most important things a student could do. Essentially, presenting the notes and providing flexible access to them constituted the first half of his answer to the question of his teaching approach. The second half of his answer was based on the centrality of tests and grades to his course.

Testing and Grades

The significance of tests and grades as unbiased representations of acquired sociological knowledge was reflected in his exclusive use of multiple-choice exams, not to mention the significant portion of the syllabus and classroom discussion devoted to discussing them. A clue to the significance of grades emerged when I tried to understand how Achebe understood "cheeky-boy`s" occasionally sarcastic (though arguably insightful) repartees, I asked Professor Achebe,

> Me: "What about that guy, that guy in the back in the baseball cap who's always saying funny stuff. How do you gauge his seriousness? Do you know?"

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[76] *Blackboard* is an online resource for instructors in Higher Education. At a minimum it allows for the virtual storage of course content and its remote access by individual students see, http://www.blackboard.com/Markets/Higher-Education-(1)/Solutions/Teaching-and-Learning/Fully-Online-Learning.aspx

Achebe: "Uhhh (shaking his head dismissively) No. To me, I don't. I don't have to gauge his seriousness or not. The only way I can gauge his seriousness is (pause). You can come to class. You can interact. So long as you don't insult other students, Right. It's ok (pause). So long as you don't disrupt the entire class, it's Ok, because it is up to you. The material is there for you to consume. If you don't consume, it's just like the saying goes, you can lead a horse to the river, (dramatic pause) but you can't make her drink. So you can come to class, but they may not be too, serious.

Me: No he's just is an interesting example, because he could be serious even though. I can't, I can't quite tell.

Achebe: No! - -(Knocking his knuckle down on the table for emphasis)

Me: He's engaged, in an interesting way.

Achebe: Yeah, but, but, you see he's engaged (said quickly under his breath) but the seriousness comes about, uh, when, I forget his name ... but if you look at the grades and how some students comes to class and do not even say a word, the whole entire semester."

Me: "But they get good grades?"

Achebe: "But then they get 90's and so forth. A's!. And so you wonder now, how do I explain why this student is so quiet?"

Me: Does that happen often? Every course?

Achebe: "Yes, in most cases. There was this, for example I can tell you, like Rebecca (pseudonym); I don't think Rebecca will ever talk in class".

Me: "But she'll get 80's at least."

Achebe: "Yes. Yes. So, I might not even have to worry about her. My worry is those who come to class, don't talk, and they get lousy grades. Because they are not telling me whether they are getting the material. They should be able to voice, for me to understand how I can help them. But, if they keep quiet, and get good grades, I don't even have to disturb them." [PD2: 009-029]."

On his view it seems that tests and grades categorically supersede classroom discussion and interaction. When talk is surface and grades are depth, the absence of classroom interaction is *not* necessarily a problem. On this account, the most important form of talk for a student is the question? 'I did not understand *x*'. However, it is the responsibility of students who are having trouble understanding the material to speak up and say so.

Teaching and Learning are Categorically Separated

In addition to the overriding significance of the community college context, Achebe articulated several themes that applied regardless context. No theme seemed more fundamental than the notion that teaching and learning were categorically separated from each other. Achebe presented the distinction as if a fact of nature. And with teaching so focused on the presentation of the material, the responsibility for learning rested ultimately with the student.

"The material is there for you to consume. If you don't consume, it's just like the saying goes, `you can lead a horse to the river, (dramatic pause) but you can't make her drink. So you can come to class, but they may not be too serious."

Thus with respect to student learning, his conception of teaching explicitly puts limits on what he can achieve in the classroom. Consequently, in order to improve an otherwise lamentable learning situation, he naturally looks to contexts beyond the classroom for inspiration and interventions.

According to Achebe, the problem of community college student learning is not entirely intractable. Part of the problem lies in the experience of taking courses outside one's major. He

suggested that such experiences deprive students of a motivation they would have otherwise had. Specifically, Achebe stipulated that 'non-sociology majors' taking sociology courses are not motivated to recall course content later. Referring to a student who had forgotten material she should have remembered, Achebe explained:

> "And then I asked the students about, `what do you know about Sigmund Freud`? And they reviewed it last semester! She said, 'I forgot.' Because for her, it was one of the courses she took in order to graduate with an associate's degree … business, human services, whatever it is and so forth ... Many of the students who go to college, even four-year colleges (and I can tell you that, even for yourself too, included) when you go to college and you don`t, and you're not *majoring* in, sometimes you don`t even take too much interest in what is going on, because it is a requirement of the college. This is why, I sometimes tell my students, I challenge the American way of say, `you have to Chemistry, you must have Physics, you must have blah blah `whatever it is and so forth; when some of us are not cut for that. Yeah ... We just go there [a general education course] because we want to get 3 credits in order to graduate. But if you asked the undergrad what do you understand, they say, ` I have no idea`." [PD2: 109]."

Achebe seemed to identify recall with understanding. Nonetheless, his solution for both was the placement of student courses in their proper *curricular* context -- the sociology major! In point of fact, while conducting this research, Professor Achebe was writing a proposal on the benefits to students (and to the college) of creating a Sociology major! Achebe saw the major as being able to provide a "home" for the academically homeless – those students who found themselves entangled in the safety net for the directionless, for him, the "Liberal Arts" major. Achebe imagined that these students, once focused upon a major, would obtain a sense of direction and motivation they otherwise did not possess. For Achebe, unless students learn sociological material in an "applied context" the material will neither be engaged nor recalled. Professor Achebe summarized his point thus:

> "… if you are offering a major in that area, because that's where the students now want to say, `I have to know, because I am going to use it! I am taking the sociology I am going to

use it`." [Achebe's emphasis]

CASE TWO: PROFESSOR SANDERS

It should be noted that Professor Sanders was particularly enthusiastic about participating in my research. He was excited that someone was "finally" going to get a "behind the scenes look" at the community college.   He was conspicuously effusive about his conceptualizations and beliefs. He was easy to interview, as if no question I asked was irrelevant, and none unworthy of thoughtful, unguarded responses

He has Changed as a Teacher

As I interviewed him about his conceptualizations of teaching, it was of utmost importance to him that I understood he had changed quite a bit in his thinking about such matters over the years. He stipulated that his perspective,

> "…has changed dramatically from one where (when I first began encountering teaching was in the private school world) … I kind of looked upon these students as spoiled brats, who should be lectured to, if not whipped, for their crummy behavior, unwillingness to learn and general snottiness. And I kind of approached it that way. Over the years I have softened tremendously to a point where I try to have tremendous respect for those people who are there and what has brought them there…" [8:004]

Indeed the development in his orientation and approach to teaching appears to have come about *because* of his association with community college students -- an experience that was unequivocally different from his time at the "private school" , the initial phase of his teaching career. In light of his background as a minister and his experiences with the students themselves, his job had become as much pastoral, as educational.

> "Over the years I have softened tremendously to a point where I try to have tremendous respect for those people who are there and what has brought them there, their backgrounds, the struggles they are going through, and really it's miraculous that I find

them sitting there and so I think my job is really to appreciate them."[8:004]

Thus Sanders suggested that his own developmental arc at the very least was congruent with the specific teaching and learning needs of community college students.

His Teaching was of Definite Origins, but of Uncertain Trajectory. Although there was an important religious context for his beliefs and approaches, Sanders exhibited no palpable religious enthusiasm or proselyting zeal in the classroom. Yet the existence of this religious context was consonant with a more subtle but continuous theme of the course – that there were contexts at stake beyond the teaching and learning of information, that imparting wisdom, for instance, could rightfully supersede the learning of actual course content[77]

That said, if Sanders had a very strong sense of where his teaching was coming from, he evinced an almost pioneering and speculative appreciation for where it was going. Any effort he made to define his approach to teaching Introductory Sociology at NECC was necessarily tentative and provisional. Indeed Sanders had depended on imagery for its definition:

"... I hope I'm somewhat like a Socrates to them. *I'm kind of like a midwife. I'm trying to midwife something.* And sociology seems to be an interesting way to do it, because it's got this potpourri of, from A to Z. I mean from Astronomy to Zoology, you could, can find something about in sociology." [PD 8:021] my emphasis]

It is possible that his use of the midwifery metaphor suggested that he now saw learning as something of a natural process, one that occurs with or without teaching, and that the task of the

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[77] There are many ways to underscore the religious nature of the service dimension he brings to his teaching, not the least of which is by his own admission. However, following example is drawn from his early days teaching at the private school and one he mentioned to me on several occasions both as a crowning achievement, and as a symbolic of his outlook. The crux of the story refers to his efforts to uplift underprivileged students. "I brought the first black student in. I'll never forget that conversation with him. Here's this guy, he came from Hartford, out of the slums of Hartford to this private school, not an elite one, but a private school, and you know, *very* different. Talking with him, he was pretty down. He was pretty down about this whole thing, `you know` and I said, I guess we were talking in the office of the church, and I said, `you know, we'll do this together. You know -- You, me and God. We`re going to do it; we're going to get you through here. You're going to make it'." One reason Sanders recalls this conversation so well is that the boy in question approached him some 25 years later --as a man, now with a Masters in Social Work, and retold it to him.

teacher was but to assist it.   Nonetheless, as we will see in the next section, in this Brave New World of teaching towards which he sets out, the roles of teacher and student are re-cast. Much more will be demanded of Sanders as a *person* than as a sociologist. His teaching authority comes not from his degree, or from his mastery of sociological content, but from the numerous roles he has occupied in life. He is fit to play the role of instructor *because* of his life experiences. This orientation to teaching ultimately personalizes the teaching *and* the content, yet it demotes the significance of Sociology the discipline. Thus sociology is transformed into a *means* for teaching life lessons, rather than the most important *ends* of a lesson itself.

Teaching Entails an Equality of Roles.

Sanders wanted me to recognize that his teaching was an enterprise where teacher and student were on equal footing, something "much more cooperative" than usual, and far different from the more "authoritarian role" he had adopted earlier in his career. He stipulated that both parties to the relationship were learners, and that this conception of teaching had important implications for student perspectives.

> "I hope they see me as someone on their side. I don't see a division here, or wall between teacher and student. We are both learning here, and *I am learning as much from them and about them, as they are about me.*"

One way this role equality manifested was in the kind the information students could expect from him. Indeed, if Sanders was to offer life-history information about himself to the students, he could in turn expect life-history information from them. More important still, if student and teacher were equals in the sharing of information, the relevance of biographical information to the course would inevitably be highlighted.

Teaching as an exchange of personal information. When I interviewed Sanders about his perspective on teaching the class, he had very little to say about the actual content. To the degree he did, he suggested that some of it would be autobiographical. Thus both content and approach reflect a,

"… much more kind of personal, of sharing, then [it] ever used to be. I used to believe that you were professional about it, that there is a division here and don't go over it. Now, I figure I'm going to really go over it, *and try to show them how an old man lived, for a long [inaudible]* … the issues that everybody has to face, so, my screw-ups and failures. The goods. The bads. And often they are quite funny. [His voice rises and speeds up enthusiastically as if to deliver a punch line]. And sociology is just a natural subject for it. I mean you can find something, you know? [8:021]

Identifying with students as grounds for teaching. For Sanders, the students' situation is reminiscent of one was in as a young man. He sees compelling parallels between their learning situation and the one he confronted as a high school student transitioning to college. Leaving his rural Massachusetts home and summer job as gravedigger for the Ivy League was a culture shock. He referred to these experiences both in our interviews, and in class. Using an anecdote he had shared in class the week previous, he told me again about his time arriving on the college campus.

" … in come these guys driving their triumph sports cars. I'll never forget who came in.[78] It wasn't a Triumph. It was, was something, some very expensive, if not rare sports car. I remember him tooling up. He had gone to, I think it was Choate, one of the big prep schools and in the back of him was this iguana, three and-a-half feet long and riding in his convertible, kind of on his back, folded like ... smiling smugly. I came out of this impoverished background, sociologically anyway, or socially speaking, and I'm supposed to process this? I'm supposed to make my way through this? And I really did." [8:113]

Thus Sanders suggested that a basis for the legitimacy of his teaching this course was his proven ability to be thrown into an alienating academic environment, to persist, and ultimately to succeed. He recollected,

" ... so there was this weird kind of background that produced me, putting me into [an

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[78] Later he would confess that it was somebody famously blue-blooded.

ivy league institution]⁷⁹. And I keep trying to. You know, *these kids are in some ways are coming into this situation as well …* And I'm hoping that what I do is, more than just giving some Sociology too them. I hope I`m giving them some perspectives on life. What a great subject to do it with (he says with enthusiastic up-speak and an emphasis on the word 'what'). Something they are going to take with them, they are going to grow into, and up to. Um, I don't know. I could go on". [8:-17] [my emphasis]

Thus on the one hand, Sanders was enthusiastic for all that Sociology (as embodied by the text) had to offer, yet he de-emphasized the discipline of Sociology itself.   In light of community college students' backgrounds, and their multiple needs, Sociology was but one element of an intellectual tool kit of Sanders hoped to them when students taking his course.

"I see these kids coming in from all these different backgrounds and possibilities, and different stresses and strains, and learning disabilities, coming in. Their lives are certainly in process. They are going somewhere (he giggles). And they are at various places and speeds etc. It's sort of like, I don't know, cooking soup or something like that. And I'm trying, I think, to give them tools, some of those are just learning tools, some will be sociological kinds of stuff that [they] might have picked up, which is going to give them a framework for a larger world." [8:111]

Thus Sanders' experience of his teaching situation was one where his identification with the students was foregrounded, and his paucity of sociological experience was put into the background

CASE THREE: PROFESSOR LOGAN

Although Logan had suggested she was open to being part of my research, it certainly felt as if it was an open question during our interview. She asked pointed questions about the nature

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⁷⁹ Of course, at the time he named the institution he attended.

of my research questions, the methods I would be using and how I would protect the data. She was guarded and cautious in her responses. She seemed to ponder quite a bit before answering many of my questions, occasionally stammering and frequently pausing. Yet these bumps in our conversation seemed but the cost of her efforts to reflect sincerely on how she conceived of her teaching. She talked in large part of the many instructional decisions she had made in teaching the course, reminding me occasionally that she had inherited the class as much as designed it. Yet for most of our discussion, she was focused on the learning goals she had for her students and how she had to adapt her means of achieving them every term.

Teaching Here is Change, so I Must Adapt

She believed students at NECC required special handholding. "You *have* to really expect, you are going to have to take them [the students] by the hand." [22:]. Towards this end she said, "I teach what walks through the door*"* [22:58];[22:27]. From her perspective, if her lessons are to meet the ever-changing needs and interests of her students, she had "to be flexible in the classroom". Indeed things could change dramatically simply depending on the time of day one taught: "[i]t`s very different teaching a three-hour class at night than an hour and 20 minute class in the day."   At the very least there is a larger proportion of "older" students that she suggested often came with a richer fund of experiences. They enriched both her experience and that of their fellow students. During our interview she recollected how an Iraq war veteran had made a powerful impact in one of her classes, and in one of her more recent night classes she recalled,

> "I had somebody who started NECC in his 70`s, an African American, was involved in the Black Power movement, spent a little time in jail, at front and center. Fantastic! You just wanted to thank him. `You make this class really good!`'" [22:87]

Flexibility entails adapting sociology content for the students. Logan sought to adapt her lessons to the interests of her students. Occasionally this involved simplifying the content. However, for Logan, simplifying content was but part of a larger strategy of breaking down and communicating a complex sociological topic. For example, when "Hobbes" was introduced to the class she began with a very simplified sketch of his ideas, one she returned to over and over

again throughout the course of the term, adding successive layers of meaning, and out of which a more complicated and completed notion of his ideas eventually emerged.

> "You know like Hobbes (referred to in class earlier today). Ok that was pretty bare bones, but then throughout the semester we can add flesh to it and elaborate it…" [22:93]

Thus, Hobbesian ideas, for instance, are first dissolved so that they can be strategically reconstituted over the course of the semester. Indeed when I asked Professor Logan to sum-up the experience of teaching at a 2-year institution like NECC she said,

> "You have to distill and distill and distill. You have to get to, like the bare bones. Cause if you want to get, … [the] … students [to] *make the connections* more, you have to lead them by the hand more, … you can't expect, that if you present these concepts and assign this reading, that they are going to get it -- 'a-ha!', that that means this, and this this mean … You *have* to really expect, you are going to have to take them by the hand … So it's always you know, 'what is the fundamental thing'; and trying to get the fundamental concept there." [22:93] [my italics]

Thus Logan appeared dedicated to figuring out how she must adapt sociological content, in order for it to be communicated to her students. A large part of our initial interview was devoted to this quest for ways to make course material more understandable or more interesting for the students:

> "… if they [the students] are not interested, my experience has been, if you can`t get them interested and enthused and thinking about, `this teacher`. You know, I get so many evaluations, you know. I`m so enthusiastic that they are willing to give me the benefit of the doubt … it`s like, 'she was so enthusiastic then it must be fun. We`ll try it out'. If you don`t get *that* early on, then it's just like drudgery…" [22:104]

Hence orchestrating that initial buy-in or engagement on the part of the students, motivating them for the course to come was a crucial piece of her teaching approach.

The responsibility for motivating students was her own

Professor Logan talked of the efforts she took to motivate her students. Her approach entailed either emphasizing the students own interests, or emphasizing the relevance of what they were learning. She took it as part of her responsibility to make the material interesting for the students -- even if only modeling her own enthusiasm for the discipline of Sociology. As noted above, finding ways to galvanize student enthusiasms was critical to a rewarding teaching and learning experience. She was often thinking about ways she might better craft her lessons so as to make them more engaging. Ultimately, Logan articulated a teaching discourse that was essentially always seeking to improve itself, especially in its capacity to engage students.

Course planning and feedback

For Logan any course she teaches is initially incomplete. It was not a module she but needed to start. There were steps to be taken before the class began, and steps she would need to take throughout the course itself. Perhaps the most important steps for any course, are those taken *between* courses. This is a time when she reflects on the previous term's feedback, trying to figure out what worked and what did not, and planning for the upcoming semester. She she's her approach to teaching as something that emerges from student feedback.

> "I think it is back and forth… I am sort of evaluated, evaluating, you know, how I did each class. What I did well. What I didn't do well. ... I have no idea if it's something, um, and then, gauging from the students' written assignments and conversation in class. I guess I've given many examples right now. This is what I have to work with. How can I draw on that? How can I tailor my expectations, so that they are realistic? But also … give them a chance, [a] chance to try to push them … "[22:56]

Hence lessons are never entirely fixed. They are inherently incomplete each one a representing a series of "recalibrations" [22:21] and experiments. Given the classroom variability from one course to the next, some of the more important recalibrations or adjustments occur very early on in the course. Logan remarked that, "[t]hese introductory weeks I am sort of learning too. What are they capable of? -- in terms of their thinking" [22:21].

She describes a hermeneutic quality to these "back-and-forths" [22:56] or "recalibrations" [22:21]. Lessons are described as textual elements circling between students and teacher over the course of the semester, in an iterative process of ever-improving understanding.   On the other hand the experimental nature of her classroom is reflected in her frequent use of sentences that begin, `last week I *tried* this`, or `this is the first time I`ve tried that`, or "last semester I was persuaded to adopt this.` For example, just last term she experimented with a new in-class writing exercise asked students to write down on index cards what they hoped to learn in the course. In addition to being engaging in-and-of-itself, the exercise became a tool to help her relate her lecture content to the individual interests of her students. Although this may have taken-up precious class time, she thought it had worked well and was something she would consider doing again this semester. I recalled her enthusiasm for this exercise,

"But I loved it [the exercise] because it was something that told me about them, what they, you know what they are interested in … and why they are here… *so now I can bring it back into my lectures, into my course, my examples, and how I present specific topics*:" 22:60 [my italics].

The experimental, ever-tweaking dimension to teaching that she articulated certainly set her apart from her colleagues' accounts.

Course Experience is Contingent on Students Present.

Not only is classroom composition an important ingredient of the course experience, but that composition is always changing. For instance, Logan remarked that there appeared to be greater numbers of *younger* students in her classrooms of recent, many of whom had already attended 4-year institutions.   And if, as we saw above, older students were capable of enriching the overall course experience, many of these younger (perhaps more traditional) college students were also capable of adding to that experience as well. She suggested that these students offered their peers a window onto the "college (i.e. campus) life experience" [22:23] – a view to a social and academic integration otherwise absent from NECC classrooms. Such students were likely to have different "backgrounds" than traditional community college students, possessing greater

amounts cultural and academic capital that had "enabled them [to enroll] at a [selective] institution" in the first place.[80]

Specifically, what Logan appreciates most about this classroom diversity is its capacity to enhance the classroom dialogue. However, just as important as it is to have students with exceptional experiences, it is also important that those students are prepared to *share* them with their classmates. Logan admitted that of recent she had been blessed with a number of "verbal" [22:23] students -- a quality she loosely identified with being "really interested in the world." [22:23]

> "Some of the more verbal ones [students] can see this is an issue about, you know religion, but there is also a whole host of other things going on, so maybe we can come back to that, when we talk about institutions, um, you know later on in the semester." [22:21]

And while some semesters indeed contained such "verbal" students who strove to see the interconnectedness of topics, in other semesters she said you, "just want to bang your head against the wall because you don't have a critical mass" [22:23], a sufficient number of students who seem interested in the course content and in the world itself. Other times she said, "it`s just bad chemistry" [22:104]. Sometimes you just "get someone with an attitude that affects the others" [22:104] and seems to tear away at a classroom's social contract. "Nevertheless, for the past three 3 semesters teaching sociology, she has had "a lot of students who do seem really interested in the world"[22:23].

And while she was interested in capitalizing on the diversity in her classrooms, this was not to be a free-for-all, a process *entirely* dependent on the interests of individual students. Instead she stipulated,

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[80] Several separate asides are worthy of note here. First we must qualify Logan`s enthusiasm for incoming students who have a background that more closely matches her own. In addition, a recent *Century Foundation* report entitled <u>Bridging the Higher Education Divide (2013)</u> suggests that in point of fact, there is a growing amount of economic stratification within the higher education sector, and that community colleges are taking an increasingly and alarmingly larger share of working class students. However, the report`s concern was to highlight the importance of developing policies to offset this trend. This supports Logan`s observations that the educational benefits of class in the classroom diversity (kids who had just come from a 4 year college) are not to be overlooked.

"I have places I want to be at, you know, at the beginning and at the end of a lecture. Sometimes I don't get there, but I know where I want to be at certain places. And I have that, when I walk in each morning. I have that when I start the course, and at the end of the semester. And I realize that can change, depending on who walks in." [22:27]

Related to this very dynamic and contingent image of teaching was the comparatively *diminished* centrality of the textbook in her course[81].

The Place of the Textbook in the Course Experience

Logan did *not* interpret her course as a reflection of the textbook. She admitted that the textbook was "not a bad text", but stipulated that she would have done things differently if the choices had been hers to make. For example, she did not think she would have employed an "encyclopedic" (Hinch, 1988) sociology textbook, one she lamented that "tries to do everything "[22:41]. … [and ultimately] too much" [22:35]. For example, she thought it preposterous to confine *theory,* a topic students found most difficult, to a single chapter

"Yeah and again, I sort of fault the text too, I mean, 'Theory and Methods in the first chapter?" (She says in disbelief) And, What is sociology? This is all in the first chapter " [22:101].

Yet she confessed that in its comprehensiveness the textbook nonetheless managed to accommodate all possible teaching approaches and interests. Alternatively, she suggested that "primary texts" with a focus on social theory could also have provided a "coherent framework" for teaching the course, that it could still "get to all these other kinds of topics" covered in a textbook, if perhaps as directly.[82] In point of fact she was the only instructor to skip an entire chapter in the textbook!

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[81] There was also a decidedly little attention paid to the issue of grading as well.
[82] While it is true that the textbook only has a section entitled theory at the beginning of the textbook, it does however take pains to discuss how social theory responds to the different central topics that define the chapters. It seems the true meaning of Logan`s criticism is that she would shift the relationship between theory and topic. For instance, in a figure-ground relationship, she would make *theory* the figure, and the topics the ground; as opposed to vice versa, which is how it exists in the text.

Testing as Formative and Transformative

In our interview Logan did not mention grades, but she had several points to make about testing. She seemed to stress both the formative and the summative evaluation of students, and stipulated that with respect to the testing in this particular course,

"It`s a process. It's not just outcome on a test; I want them to study. I want them to spend [the time], if they have to put together … small writing, whatever they want, it`s up to them; then I know they have done that" [22:47][83]

In addition to being sensitive of the diversity in an NECC classroom, she was equally concerned for diversity in methods of assessing students. Hence she was committed to "multiple modes for evaluation" and did not express a strong preference for any one kind. She was concerned that students who take her course should undergo a valued-added experience. Thus as a general rule for her writing assignments she said:

"I need to have evidence that you took the course … even if I have a course where they only write papers … `I don`t want you to turn in a paper that you could have written before you took my course" [22:45]

For Logan, assessment helped to create a sociological sensibility, a feel for the " … unique lens that Sociology brings to the field" [22:15]), for a perspective they did *not* have upon entering her course. Testing was not a simple means of assessing what has been learned (i.e. Achebe), but a means of learning in and of itself.

Learning as Making Connections.

For Logan, we see that teaching was essentially defined by *change*. As a matter of changing students, she suggested in entails giving them the capacity to make meaningful "connections" they had not anticipated before. Thus connections seemed as if they could be made and discovered –by virtue of connections within which students were already embedded. Of course students did not always do so. Seeking clarification on the capacity of some students

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[83] She does seem to be evincing an Astin-like concern for *involvement* here too (Astin, 1984)

to `see` these connections, I asked, in a manner of speaking, if some might not "already be mini sociologists" [22:116], to which she responded,

> "Yes! Yes! Exactly! Exactly! And sometimes their discussion, and I mean, you want to talk about gender—I had this girl who was a receptionist at a car dealership, you know, who is Latina, and you know, and they come in. But sometimes they don`t. You know? I understand; but-those *connections*!" [22:118]

Logan herself appeared to be excited by the implications of this student's connections, the nested set of social groups within which the student was embedded.

A virtue of the classes Logan taught at NECC was that they were rife with sociologically interesting cases and with rich connections at stake. One day while walking back to her car, she confessed to being occasionally astonished at the confluence of ethnicity, gender and class that so-often cross cut her students' lives. In the example above, she wondered about a Hispanic student's frustrations working at the front desk of a car dealership. Logan imagined how significant it would for a student to see her frustrations as reflections of role strain and her social position: of a minority woman trying to be both student and employee, assuming a feminized occupational role in a working-class, male-dominated job setting. For Logan, at stake in her course is a student's ability to connect such dots!

Of course, not all students will recognize such connections between personal lives and social categories/processes, between what C. Wright Mills called "private troubles and social problems". Yet making such connections was associated with her espoused objective of helping students to develop "critical thinking skills", something she understood as decidedly more than "understanding in a descriptive sense" [22:21]. She imagined that discovering/perceiving these connections was a relatively infrequent event, that they were spontaneous and not altogether under one's control. They are moments of inspiration, of seeing clearly with ones mind's-eye how the elements of one`s own life story are in 'reality' connected through *social frames* or topics learned in class. Such a moment represented the proverbial "a-ha moment" [22:21]:

> "You know, I would love it if more of my students had those Aha! moments. (*Imitating a pondering student*) `Wait a minute. Maybe 'Stratification in Education, maybe that's why

I'm here?' You know? 'I always thought, you know, when I was raised, we talk about culture, and you know what our values are, what our story is, that I can do anything and be anything. Look at Barack Obama!' But what is, you know, what's representative? How do we know? And, how do I fit in?"

In that vein she remarked that there was an opportunity for particularly powerful " a-ha" moments" once the students arrived at the "stratification of education" topic in the course. She imagined that some students might even begin to reflect upon their own enrollment at a community college, ultimately asking themselves, "why am I here." [22:70].

To facilitate the development of her students' critical thinking, she had intended to examine *the use of textbooks in higher education itself*! She imagined asking the students to consider who (in the population of higher education students) was more likely to learn sociology from *encyclopedic* textbooks,[84] such as the one they were using? And who, on the other hand, was more likely to learn Sociology from reading primary sources? Upon arriving at this part in the course she imagined she would say:

> "[W]e talk about it when we talk about education … [as if talking to a student she says] 'this textbook is an authority telling you what Durkheim and Mauss said, why don't *you* read it yourself and figure and decide for yourself … who is more likely to read Durkheim and Mauss, directly? (Pause) And why aren't you?" [22:89]

That said, Logan was indefatigable in reminding me how such dialogues depended in the first place on the classroom composition – the mercurial nature of which was a significant feature of teaching Sociology at NECC.

Analysis

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[84] This is not her term, but following Hinch (1988) this is the term that I also use to describe such textbooks.

On the Salience of Context

All three instructors were self-conscious of their teaching environment, of the fact that they were not teaching at just any college, but at *a community college.* They all thought that teaching at a 2-year college was special and that it entailed a unique set of conditions. However Logan and Sanders were more muted on the significance of this context, while Achebe was unabashedly direct. He appeared to take the 2-year 4-year college distinction as a basic dualism of Higher Education.   Logan herself stipulated that you could not just expect to "present the material to *these* students" and it be sufficient. She said you must expect to have to "take *them* by the hand." Both Logan and Achebe assumed that a large part of what distinguishes teaching at a 2-year college was the under-preparedness of many of its students. Yet between the two, were some very marked differences with likely significant ramifications. Alternatively, Sanders had suggested that college could be an alienating experience for many of these students, a matter of social class not academics, and one he thought he could identify with.

The underprepared community college student. Logan described the challenge of teaching at a community college as rooted in the heterogeneous stream of students that flowed into her classes each semester.   There was simply no way to predict their capacities or predilections. Even the same class taught as a night section could be surprisingly different from its day version. Because she could not control "what" walked through the door, it was important to be able adapt to each and every unique situation. Her guiding motto for teaching at NECC was, "I teach whatever walks in." -- the suggestion being that though teachable, these students were somehow underprepared and in need of special consideration.

Achebe by contrast was much less ambiguous about how the students were underprepared. As part of his argument he noted that conceptually, the 2-year college was *not* a full college *per se*; but rather a "bridge" between a *positive* 4-year college pole, composed of university students with "direction", and a *negative* high school pole with directionless ones.   On his account, the negative high school pole has tainted a large number of community college students. They were not as "serious" nor as academic as 'we' presume, and possessed what Achebe called a "shameful" level of literacy.

 Achebe presented a no-nonsense, hard-nosed pragmatic approach – stern, but with a smile. It was not so important what he believed about teaching, what mattered was how he taught!   It was a perspective that paralleled his view of the students themselves: it's was not so much a

matter of what they *say* in class or their attitude in general, what mattered was *how they performed on the tests*. It should be said that while for Logan the academic under-preparedness of the students was noteworthy, for Achebe it was an overriding concern if not a defining feature of the institution!

Sanders: The forgotten over-prepared students. Sanders was not moved to mention the needs of underprepared students; to the contrary he focused on the needs of the bright capable minority he inevitably found in his classes, students he believed would have been better served at an elite college. He suggested that in light of the students' otherwise challenging lives, a large part of his job was to act as witness, to "really to appreciate them"

Yet he was unclear if what he was doing was actually teaching! As an approach, it was evolving still. He had a much stronger sense of where it had come than for where it was going. What he did know was that it represented a radical departure from convention. He likened himself to a "midwife," stipulating that his approach was "much more cooperative", relinquishing the more "authoritarian" approach he had adopted earlier, and creating something that resembled a community of learners exchanging personal information with one another. If traditional midwives were keepers of the mysteries of childbirth, Sanders appeared to hold the mysteries of life more generally. However it did seem that even by his own lights, Sociology lost some of its significance, becoming more of a *means* to this more worldly knowledge, than an end in itself.

A contrast in tones. Though Logan and Achebe shared a concern for the under preparedness of their students, they talked about it in different ways. Achebe's story was about needy students and the efficient provision of appropriate materials to them; Logan's story focused on continuously tweaking and improving the quality of the classroom experience, itself measured by the depth and engagement of students in discussion. When speaking with Sanders, under-preparedness was *not* the 'elephant in the room'. Instead, a pastoral care for the students appeared to eclipse the teaching of sociology itself.

Interventions for the Under-Prepared

Achebe: Curricular interventions Unlike Sanders, for Achebe and Logan the learning of sociology content was the unmistakable goal of the course. Yet for Achebe, this learning was

in crisis. Moreover his "consumptionist" image of teaching and learning, separating one from the other, placed (logical) limits on how he imagined he could address this crisis. Like leading *a horse to water,* you can present students with knowledge but you cannot make them learn it. Thirst can be quenched not created, and motivation cannot be taught.

Unable to influence student motivations in the classroom Achebe focused on curricular interventions.   He believed that *only* by studying introductory sociology in the context of a sociology *major* could learning-outcomes be improved.[85] According to Achebe, information acquired in the context of a major would impress upon the student that what they were learning was something they were "going to *use*."[86]

Also in the spirit of curricular-level interventions, Achebe underscored the importance of selecting the right textbook for the community college student.   Echoing the hard-nosed attitude mentioned above, he was decidedly not interested in textbooks that embellished their content, dancing about topics and creating a "maze" of unnecessary circumlocutions that made it difficult for only the most expert readers to decipher[87].

Logan: Classroom interventions (or teaching).   Logan by contrast saw the classroom as a significant locus of intervention.   She believed that 'A-ha' moments emerged from rich discussions, and that these depended on whether or not the class had a "critical mass" of students with sociologically relevant backgrounds, verbal skills, and a preparedness to share. Iraq War veterans, Black Power prisoners, older students with considerable life experiences in general, or younger students who with higher education experience in particular, all had been sources of engaging discussions and powerful learning experiences. Yet from Logan's perspective, you never knew who would show up each term. Classroom composition was as varied as it was unpredictable, and ultimately, so was the course experience itself.

On being flexible. Though both Logan and Achebe claimed to approach their teaching flexibly, flexibility meant different things to them both. For Achebe, flexibility referred to the pains he took to ensure that his notes were available to the students -- with on-line testing itself

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[85] In particular they would be improved for the ostensibly "homeless" (i.e aimless) 'general studies' students who opted for it.

[86] This effort to make a general education class into something more vocational is a rather nuanced effort on Acbebe's part. On his account, *useful* also entails eventually having to answer for choosing that major. Thus *applied* in this instance seems also to refer to knowing that you would have to have employ in a future conversation.

[87] In my opinion the classroom humor Achebe certainly employed seemed designed more to entertain the students while they were in the classroom, than to inspire them outside of it.

epitomizing such availability. For Logan, it meant being adaptable to incoming student heterogeneity.   For example, she believed that different students possessed different *learning styles,* and for the sake of both accuracy and fairness it was important to employ "multiple testing methods." Students thus could be assessed in the manner most congruent with their learning styles.[88]   Also, she claimed to keep her lessons relatively open. She purposefully did not script them entirely in advance. She claimed instead to have "places she wanted to be at by the end", and while she knew where her lessons would ultimately arrive, she could not predict how classroom discussions would lead there.

Logan appeared to be in the habit of imagining her courses as an ongoing series of verbal interventions and site of pedagogical experimentation.   She constantly looked for an opportunity to create an "ah-a moment" for her students, along with the words or phrases she could employ to precipitate one. During one of our interviews an intervention/ teachable moment occurred to her. Hence she elaborated on the verbal prompts that would likely be necessary to execute such a lesson. Pretending to lecture to a student in such a lesson she said,

> "This textbook is an authority telling you what Durkheim and Mauss said. Why don't *you* read it [Durkheim and Mauss in the original] yourself and figure and decide for yourself … Who is more likely to read Durkheim and Mauss, directly? (Pause) And why aren't you?" [22:89]

This appeared to be a stark contrast with Achebe, who questioned the students' very ability to read the textbooks they were given in the first place, let alone their ability to read primary texts. And while Logan appeared to agree that teaching at a community college entailed stripping things down to their basics, she categorically did *not* opt for selecting *simpler* textbooks. In fact, she seemed to suggest that when it came to more difficult topics, there were limits to how much they could be stripped down in the first place. Instead she believed one had to circle back to difficult topics again and again over the course of a semester (e.g. Hobbes). Yet this approach conjures-up an image of the circumlocutions that were anathema to Achebe -- superfluous intellectual exercises he believed best reserved for academic elites.

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[88] Thus Logan shows a tacit acceptance of the notion of *learning styles* as relatively obdurate attributes of students.

For Achebe students either came to class motivated, or they did not! And in light of the pervading lack of seriousness he described, it appeared he believed that a sizeable proportion of his students did not. He thought motivation could be fostered in some by providing them with a Sociology major; as motivation was not really something to be enhanced within the classroom itself. By contrast, Logan saw student enthusiasm for learning in general as something to be generated by teaching, something that she was responsible for. She suggested that such enthusiasms emerged from powerful classroom experiences, and from her capacity to model enthusiasm for the sociology itself.

For Achebe, learning experiences were neither principally, nor necessarily located in the classroom.   The classroom was more of an information depot or loading dock. Students came to class to pick up the information qua 'notes'.   Most (if not all) learning was imagined to take place while studying for the exams and the results of these exams were a measure of preparation time and how well a student had been able to pick-up and retain what had been 'dropped-off' earlier in class.   Alternatively, for Logan it was important that tests not become the ultimate goal. She stipulated that to her the learning was much more of a classroom-based "process", and that her exams were an effort to enhance student *involvement*[89] in the material. While Logan struggled against making grades and exams all meaningful, Achebe embraced it. Achebe appeared by contrast to reflect little on the nature of student involvement and engagement, or as he tersely summed-up in our interview, "But, if they keep quiet, and get good grades, I don't even have to disturb them."

In sum, Achebe was teaching amidst a learning crisis, one that required a macro-level intervention. Logan evinced no such signs of a crisis, but saw her interventions on a decidedly more mundane scale. Between the two instructors was the difference between a dynamic system, and a broken one. For Logan, the problems of learning seemed less a matter of *fixing students* than of *adapting one's teaching*. Consequently, she was constantly intervening, observing and "recalibrating" her courses, both during, and between them.

On Instructor Agency

All three instructors believed that the parameters for teaching were *not* entirely in their own hands. Sanders had claimed, "these classes are not oriented for the person going to

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[89] Involvement is Astin's term, but covers essentially the same kind of concept she was trying to communicate.

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Harvard" (above). Presumably "these" classes were *his* classes too, yet apparently he did not feel as if he had full ownership of them.[90] Logan's perceived lack of control was less systematic and had more to do with managing randomness: in any given semester the quality of the teaching and learning experience critically depended on who constituted the class -- either she would be blessed with a critical mass of "verbal" students and the class would flower, or, she would not be so blessed and the class would flounder --"when you'd just want to bang your head against the wall." Achebe's account of his own teaching expressed a fundamental inability to influence the students in the classroom, that learning outcomes were in a way already predisposed to be negative. Indeed he could do everything correctly; he could present the material, be available for questions, but without the students' own motivation to learn, there was little he could do.

These instructors suggested that how they taught was not entirely in their hands, they were able to articulate a part of the teaching was their own. Yet each instructor had slightly different goals. For Sanders the paramount student outcome seemed to be wisdom, for Achebe, it was grades, and for Logan it came down to "making connections" -- all other dimensions of the learning experience appeared subsidiary to these ends. Each instructor's approach was related to a different *espoused* teaching and learning relationship: for Sanders there was a sense that the role of teacher and learner were fused, that they were *both* learners; Achebe would seem to have been incapable of blurring these roles. He gave sociology -- they could take it, or leave it! Finally Logan seemed to imagine a more facilitative relationship, where in light of her students' she would "take them by the hand" and help them to connect the sociological dots.

Sanders was the only instructor who did not refer explicitly to student learning and he was also the only instructor to have suggested that community college *courses* (not students) were fundamentally deficient and unchallenging. Between Logan and Achebe, only Logan however seemed to see it was her responsibility to make up for those deficiencies. Finally, there was a curious distinction still between Achebe and Sanders, whereby Sanders suggested that empathy was required for good teaching, Achebe suggested that a use of empathy was likely instead to lead to bad teaching

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[90] Arguably as an adjunct he is not expected to have such a sense of ownership.

Chapter 5
Instructors' Approaches to
Teaching the First Day of Class

The basic structure each instructor created for his or her first day of class provided the foundation upon which the rest of the course would be built. For most students I interviewed, the course-taking experience was framed by their first day experiences. They formed their first impressions and expectations as their teachers introduced the instructional processes for teaching and learning sociology. The first day of class was the *only* class when the presentation of sociological content was *not* the dominant purpose of the lesson. It was instead an orientation: dominated by explicit references to how the content *would be* taught, how it would be assessed, and by implicit references to the nature of that content[91]. Many of the structuring dimensions that would become significant later in the course were previewed that first day.

Though all the instructors eventually settled into lecture-dominant, textbook-driven lessons, there would be significant variation in how they did so. The first class was a sign of the variation to come (as explained in the next chapter). In addition instructors' habitual approaches to teaching and their intentions for the upcoming course were framed in the first day and eventually situated within their curricular and institutional contexts (Chapter 6). And though the teaching would become decidedly more routine thereafter, much of the instructors' hopes for the course, if not its limits, were set that first day.

Thus, even before the instructors had truly begun to layout the textbook content in earnest, their eventual instructional strategies were evident on the first day. Further, glimpses of the roles students and teachers would routinely take were portrayed the first day: Achebe was the sometimes joking, sometimes juridical jester who *said* he stood apart from his students; Sanders was the wise seer who *said* he stood with his students; and Logan was the trickster who suggested the students should question the very roles themselves.

Moreover, that Professor Logan would come to express a categorically different approach to teaching than the other two instructors was visible from the very beginning.[92] Unlike her

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[91] Though Professor Achebe (as we shall see in this chapter) is somewhat of an exception that proves the rule, as he jumped into lecturing on the textbook content in the remaining 10 minutes of the class.
[92] That Professors Achebe and Sanders can be distinguished from Logan comes out more readily in the next chapter.

colleagues, Logan sought to *show* her students how they could *not* take the social world for granted, how their teachers cannot be assumed, and by analogy, nor can the knowledge they teach. In contrast, Achebe and Sanders were decidedly more direct – sociology was precisely what they (or textbook says it is). Of Sociology, Professor Achebe *commanded* his students to obtain it, Professor Sanders *told* them, it was theirs to obtain, Logan on the other hand suggested that she could help it so be seen. These variations in introducing a class provided visibility into what it would be like to experience their courses. By examining how students were introduced to sociology, we can develop a better appreciation of the relationship between academics and persistence at a New England community college.

The dimensions I have observed and isolated in the analyses below emerge not only from observing the majority of the subsequent classes taught by these instructors that semester, but from my own background (having been both a teacher of and student in the social sciences) also influences my interpretations. Also, writing up this portion of the analysis after the actual course itself had finished diminished my ability to capture some of that day's immediacy and indeterminacy. However, the sustained engagement in the course over the semester, coupled with the benefit of hindsight, drew me to dimensions of the day that resonated with my own experience of the course *as a whole*.[93]

Case One: Professor Achebe

Professor Achebe was Associate Professor of Psychology, Sociology, and Anthropology at New England Community College where he had taught introductory sociology every year since he arrived 10 years ago. The last Tuesday in August 2010, was the first day of class for the fall semester course. I sat at the back of the room. Professor Achebe stood at the threshold to the classroom wearing a flat scotch-cap and a jade-green African tunic with a band of white lace running along its V-neck.   He was little more than 5-foot-6, but solid. I recalled the power of his handshake when we first met, his disproportionately large hands and how one of them now was resting on the classroom door handle as the students trickled in.   Glancing at the clock towards the back of the room he waited till the second hand ticked its way to the top; he

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[93] And while these are my observations of the day, they are tempered not only by my experience of the course as whole, but this *whole* also entails 42 interviews with students over the semester and across all three courses.

tightened his grip and shut the door.

The classroom he taught in could not have been plainer. Two white walls, a multi-paneled blackboard, a far wall for windows and blinds. Front and center was a large teacher's desk, behind which unfurled a screen from the ceiling. In front of the desk were seven rows of student desks, each single sided access and a wire cage compartment underneath the seat. There were several open desks that day, and in several instances a student did not always have another student behind them.

Formalities: The Syllabus.

Without a word, he closed the door and passed out the syllabi. He handed a stack to each student sitting in a front row desk. Each student kept a copy and dutifully passed the rest backwards. Once everyone had a copy, Achebe reminded them that, "this is Principles of Sociology, 101." In his East-African-accented English, he explained that the two double-sided pages stapled together in their hands (and projected onto the screen) was not simply a list of dates and assignments.   He stipulated that in reality it was "a contract, between you, me, and the college" – pausing between each word for dramatic effect. A significant portion of that first day was spent going over the terms of the contract. His voice firm, his tone authoritative, it was a serious moment and the students listened.

Professor Achebe was about 55 years old when I met him. He was born and raised in East Africa, where he lived until departing for Canada on a higher education scholarship. He received his undergraduate degree in Sociology from a Public University in Canada and a Master's degree from a comprehensive regional university there too. He moved to the US and completed a Ph. D in Sociology from the state's flagship public research University -- the same state that supports New England Community College. His dissertation was demographic in nature and analyzed the rural-urban migration in an East-African nation. Before arriving at NECC he had taught at several 2-year and 4-year colleges throughout the state.   At NECC he is the only faculty member in the Department of Social Sciences with a doctorate in Sociology, and he was responsible for selecting the textbook used by all *Principles of Sociology* instructors. The term I observed Professor Achebe he was teaching 6 classes: 3 classes of *Principles of Sociology*, 1 class in *Social Problems*, and 2 courses of *Introductory Anthropology*.

With a remote control in hand, he lectured on the syllabus. The syllabus was 4 pages

long and each was projected onto the screen in its turn. He read most of the syllabus aloud, word for word, stopping every now and then to comment or to underscore a point.   It all seemed pretty standard, the rhythm familiar: "Office Hours", "Required Text", "Course Description", "Course Objectives/Goals, Course Requirements, each was described without interruption.   A larger section entitled, "Grading System" listed the points necessary for the different letter grades. A student needed between 95 and 100 points for an "A", 90 to 94 points for an "A-" and so one all the way down the scale to an "F", for anything 60 and below.

Tests and Exams. Both Achebe and the students became much more animated upon arriving at the section in the syllabus entitled, "Test and Exams" (PD: 106). Whatever else tests were, it was clear from the syllabus that they were also very significant. A casual glance quickly conveyed that different textbook chapters would be covered each week, and that a test was scheduled every third week. Tests were written in capitals and in bold font (e.g. **TEST #1, TEST#2**, etc.) and besides each was written "Time Allowed" and a corresponding number of minutes (PD: 107). 60 minutes were allowed for regular tests, 90 minutes for the mid-term and 120 minutes for the final.

In the section of the syllabus on "Grades and Exams" the following was written: "Save each individual answer as you proceed. Don`t use **SAVE ALL** at the end of the test" (bold capitalization in the original) [PD 106]. Indeed a considerable portion of class time was spent explaining the mechanics of taking on-line examinations. Professor Achebe tried to make it clear that although test days were scheduled during class time, the on-line testing environment made it unnecessary for students to "show-up" on them. Yet the idea of not attending class on test days was somewhat surprising and required convincing. Several times he warned the students that should they show up, they would be forced to take a *written* test. "Don't show up here in class, unless you want to do the paper version of your exam" (PD 95: 008-009).   He was insistent. For those still not convinced, who still might want to take a paper version of the exam, he reiterated the benefits of the on-line option. "Anytime you want to take the test, take it. But don't show up to class. I don't expect you to be here if you don't have to." (PD: 95: 028)

Comical and Categorical. Foreshadowing the banter-like tone that would recur throughout the semester and trying to convince any students who still want to sit for the exams in class Achebe said, "I don't want you to be here" (PD 95: 011). The mock seriousness of his tone added to the humor of the moment. He pointed out that this way the students had the "freedom"

to use the regular class time any way *they* wished. According to Achebe the freedom to take a test anywhere was one of the key virtues of online testing. He said, "You could be in New York, you could be on the moon--I don't care" (PD 95: 011).[94] Such *exaggerated,* if not feigned, candor though astonishing at first, was ultimately a source of laughter for many in the class.

His flip, irreverent style often made the students chuckle. In light of a lecture otherwise full of prescriptions and commands, his humor appeared to balance the more authoritarian tone he had set earlier. In what would be an exceptional identification with the students, he argued that he too only shows up for class when he must. "I'm not here Monday. I'm not here on Wednesday. I'm not here on Friday. So don't come! That`s the beauty of teaching. I don't have to be here unless I'm engaged." (PD: 95: 022)

Ultimately, he lays out a rather rudimentary and fragmentary political-like rationale for not taking tests in the classroom[95]. If the syllabus was in reality a "contract" and online exams were an expression of "freedom", then taking advantage of that freedom he stipulated, was a "privilege" (PD 95: 032). And whereas a privilege can be thought of something earned, or something to which one is entitled, Achebe argued that in this instance they were gifts. "I`m being liberal. I'm *giving* you a privilege to do an online test. I'm supposed to have you here to take the test but you don't have to be. I'm *giving* you a privilege" [my emphasis] (PD 95: 030 032). Nonetheless a class that had started out as a matter of formalities gave way to an undercurrent of jocularity, which led to a second portion of the lesson marked by familiarity.

Familiarities

With the more formal details of testing dispensed with, Achebe switched to an informal and more familiarizing gear. He proceeded from row to row of desks, asking each student in succession their names. He would reconcile their responses with the class list at hand then ask each one where they were from. He offered glib (if not corny) rejoinders to *each* of their answers. For example, to the young woman from "Deep River" he asked if she were sure that her town was "not shallow?" He mockingly exaggerated the sounds of place names he hadn`t heard of, or, to even greater comical effect, acted befuddled when students from the same city

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[94] If a student, for whatever *inexplicable* reason, did not want to take the test elsewhere, and instead wanted to come to class for it, Professor Achebe was prepared to leave a paper copy of the exam with the department's administrative assistant for her to administer.

[95] Such claims are inevitably ideological, but employing the image of a beneficent autocrat as the foundation for a liberal order struck me as ironic.

were not already acquainted. Of one pair he asked, and re-asked over the course of the class, if they were certain they didn't know each other? This more familiarizing and comical ice-breaker[96] took up at least a full third of the class time that day.

The Challenge. The most notable and sustained interaction with any student that day came in the form of a challenge. As if to balance a long and otherwise one-sided set of commands and inquiries, a young man in the far corner, wearing a baseball cap and sunglasses stood out that day as having quite a bit to say by way of unsolicited comments and questions -- in my journal I dubbed him "cheeky-boy."[97] What follows is one of several exchanges between Achebe and Cheeky-boy that day:

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Cheeky-boy: "What's your name, and where are *you* from?"

Achebe: "I gave you my name, it's on the syllabus."

Cheeky-boy: "I mean how do you pronounce it?"

Achebe: "Who knows where I am from?" (He says to the class)

First Student: Zimbabwe?

Second Student: Nigeria?

Achebe: *answers with a one word (a country in East Africa)*

Cheeky-boy: "I'm assuming you don't commute from *East Africa*?"

Achebe: *Long pause* "Yeah, I don't live around here". I run away from my students (*smiling*

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[96] In addition to making the students more comfortable in the class, it was also a conscious effort on Achebe's part to commit their names to memory and possibly a way to make the connection between him and the student more personal. Of course the loss of anonymity could have both negative and positive implications for a student.

[97] I would have eventually wanted to interview cheeky-boy and probably would have ultimately given him a different title; however, he dropped the class about a month into it and I never saw him again.

though still seemingly serious). I live in Mainsbridge. I tell you, if a student moved into my neighborhood, I would move."

He went on to discuss how he came to this State from East Africa through Canada to finish his Ph.D. Cheeky-boy asked, "how old are you" to which he replied. "I told you, I'm old. I am not young" [PD: 95 63-65][98]. He mentioned how his children were attending the state's flagship research intensive university, the same one that he obtained his doctorate. Thus he told them, "See I am a bulldog through and through." At which point, the students laughed again.

Another comedic moment ensued when Professor Achebe commanded the students to turn "down" their cell phones. Specifically he said, "some of you have phones that go, #%$$@!#!" – screaming a loud string of random, incomprehensible intergalactic sounds. Jolted by his loud theatrics and absurd noises, the students chuckled. He continued, though more seriously, "NO! This is not the tower of Babel".

Achebe's humor that day was very adversarial yet tongue-and-cheek. As for computing the relative proportion of each test in this course he pointed out, "I don't have to calculate that for you now, you are in college." Or his reasons for spending so much time going over the on-line exams, he said so that there would be "no lame excuses." Or, after he finished explaining how the grades were to be allotted in the class he said, "This is my grading system. I've had it for a long time … I'm old. I've been teaching longer than some of you have been alive. Sorry, but it's true." Still, once all the students had finished introducing themselves, he paused, flashed a long, full-toothed smile and told them, "You are *all* welcome."

Introducing the textbook and its slides. In the remaining 10 to 15 minutes the third act of this opening day began. Achebe turned to what would become *the* central experience of the course -- the listening to lecture with its accompanying set of PowerPoint slides. In the course of these several slides, he remarked how in sociology "we go beyond common sense"; that it entails "seeing the general in the particular", the "strange in the familiar", and that it employs both an "industrial" and a "global perspective." Each of these phrases was represented as bulleted points on slides, referring to topic headings from the opening pages of the textbook. Much of the remaining class time was spent giving examples of what these phrases meant.

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[98] The interchange between Cheek-boy and Professor Achebe quite possibly had undertones of racism, with Cheeky boy showing a recalcitrance he might not have shown other instructors, or, he may have been balking at what he perceived to be the authoritarian character of Achebe's presentation. Again, as the young man did not persist in the class, I was unable to gather sufficient data to follow up on this matter.

He explained the notion of seeing the 'general in the particular' with the example of taking "milk and sugar in your tea". For the "strange in the particular" he remarked how you could burn our own car, "burn it to ashes" and then it is transformed into, "damaged *property*"! Or for that matter, how we could be driving in our "Honda", with an odometer that goes up to "240" and still chose not to drive even close to that speed. This, he says, shows how we become "prisoners of society." Cheeky-boy for his part asked if burning the car was for "extra credit", and wondered aloud "where you could find a Honda that goes 240" [PD: 95 70-74].

Achebe's last request that day was for the student to, "*finish* reading chapter one". His series of slides clearly paralleled the content in the textbook: more slides remained to be revealed, some every class, until the textbook was finished in mid- December

Case Two: Professor Sanders

At over 6-feet tall, broad shoulders and a shaved head, Prof. Sanders was a commanding presence. That first Monday of the course the 65-year old adjunct instructor was sporting a short-sleeved, purple-colored polo shirt, khakis and boat shoes. He looked the part of a CEO who taught part-time as community service -- his teaching an expression of goodwill, and not a need for extra cash[99]. Like Achebe, he too stood at the door and waited. At the precise hour, Professor Sanders closed the door and said, "I will always begin on time". His booming voice matched the figure he had cut; it was a voice he would come to rely throughout the semester.

Sanders' classroom was across the hallway from Professor Achebe's, but smaller and much more densely packed.   A young man about 18 years old in a brown leather jacket arrived a few minutes late and was forced to take the lone remaining desk up against the blackboard to the front. With the students pressed right up against him, Sanders asked, "Who`s new here?  Some six to seven hands went up in the air. "Wow!  That`s a lot of new people here." Commenting even further on the show of hands he said,
"You are seeing a sociological phenomenon in our society. We are over-crowded. I remember the *old days* where I would teach to 12, maybe 15 students, now we have close to 40 students in this class" [my emphasis]. [PD 92 032]. Thus he introduced the discipline, suggesting that it was

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[99] This was certainly not the case, but nonetheless that was my first day impression.

capable of placing everyday phenomena within a larger *context*[100].

His close proximity to the students (beyond being an artifact in the density of students in the classroom) seemed to reflect a concern for minimizing the social distance between him and the students. If anything, he suggested that his age and his experiences were going to be an asset to the students own learning experience. "I've been teaching a long time and I've come a long way in my thinking about it, and I think that I've come to understand some of the hurdles you are facing." [PD 92 021]. In addition, and as part of the laying out of expectations and responsibilities that tend to characterize 'first days', he stressed, "I am not your adversary." [PD 92 016] -- What came through loud and clear that first day was Sanders' *good* intentions. He approached the students the empathic old sage, who *knows what they are going through*.

An Implicitly Religious Context for Teaching[101]

Pointing to the textbook on the lectern he underscored its significance for the course. And though he didn't use the phrase, he seemed to suggest that by taking this course the students would be receiving the gospel, gaining perhaps an education in character. "That book is your *bible* (pausing for dramatic effect) bring it to class every time … Most of you are not going be professional sociologists, but you are going to be doing something!" [my emphasis] PD 92 020-022]. Two relatively minor themes seemed to run through that first day: 1) students could put their *faith* in him, and *2)* they should certainly put their *faith* in the textbook. Indeed later in the lesson (after recounting a couple of personal anecdotes). From the very beginning he endeavored to inspire his students. He reassured them, "Everyone of you should get through this. Just get reading. Get reading. Get reading." [PD 92 042]

When I met Sanders, he had begun his third year of teaching Introductory Sociology. As an Ivy League graduate in American History, with a Masters Degree in Divinity from a theological seminary in the Northeast, his emphasis on faith and leadership was not altogether surprising. His particular Masters degree was one usually sought by those seeking ordination for professional ministry. However after finishing his graduate training[102] he seized an exciting

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[100] This is something he would do throughout the course as well.

[101] This was a theme whose relevance was only noticeable for me in hindsight: That is, from interviews with him about his own personal life *coupled* with how he had approached the course as a whole.

opportunity to teach at a New England prep school where he could be *both* a member of the teaching faculty and the school`s chaplain.   And so began his career in teaching quite, "by accident"

Eventually he left the Prep School, to become NECC's Director of Development, (and part-time adjunct instructor of History).   In 2004, he stopped his work at the college to take an administrative position at a nearby hospital. Yet his stint as Director of Major Gifts at St Mary's did not quite go as he had hoped and 2-years later he was back at NECC, but this time strictly as a part-time history instructor. And though I met him as an instructor of *Principles of Sociology*, his usual teaching assignment was the college`s survey History course, *Western Civilization I.*

His(stories) and History

Like many of his subsequent lectures, Sanders first day had its fair share of reminiscences. His booming voice, wild swings of pitch and tempo, generous use of dramatic pauses and a concern for details, ensured that his anecdotes were captivating. The first day's lecture comprised three anecdotes: the first two suggested a sympathy that he had with the students, while the third formed part of a critique of Modernity and alluded to the intellectual value of theoretical distance.

The first anecdote was drawn from the very beginnings of his teaching career and described an interaction he observed between a father and his son at the elite New England prep school where he had worked.[103] The son had been having difficulties with his studies and they had risen to a level of seriousness where the parents needed to be called in (by now the class was listening intently). Sanders explained how he met the father to discuss the gravity of the situation. He had told the father how this matter warranted a follow-up meeting. At which point the father became exasperated and unraveled a "3-year long planner" -- troubled though his son may have been, he didn't have an opening for such a meeting for the "next four months!" Reaffirming his disdain for such a perspective Sanders emphasized, "for-his-*own*- son!– dramatically pausing between each word. According to Sanders` this may have been a turning point in his own thinking, when he came to understand that rich kids had their own problems or "baggage" too. The moral of his story presumably was that the conditions of more wealthy families should neither be envied, nor unequivocally esteemed.

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[103] His position also entailed being a residence hall counselor.

The scenario for his second anecdote took place at yet another campus replete with privilege. And once again, a 'problematic' father-son interaction that he had witnessed left its mark. Sanders vividly described a situation where a young man (a student) purposely crashed his father`s Rolls Royce into a stone pylon that he was only *pretending* to park.  Sanders recalled the son's "satisfied smirk" upon wrecking his father`s very expensive and prestigious car. Again, he explained that this kid had "some serious baggage." [PD 92 040]

After illustrating how emotional pathologies and familial dysfunction can afflict even the wealthiest and most advantaged in society, he took a more direct approach to motivating the students stating flatly, "Everyone of *you* should get through this." [PD 92 042] However, he stipulated that in order to do so, you will need to "get reading, get reading, get reading … We'll be working our way through this book. There will be very little lecturing." [PD 92 042] That said, he proceeded with his lecture.

History, and the pursuit of depth. Sander's third anecdote was a move from his own past to the past in general -- to History. He told the students how on the first day of class in his Western Civilization course he usually brought in a "hundred year-old letter" to show the students. The letter he explained was part of a back and forth correspondence between a brother and his sister about very mundane and quotidian matters. Yet this chronicle of mere everyday trivia was nonetheless "*15*-pages-long! (again pausing between each word for dramatic effect). He remarked that the letter unfurled over "both" the fronts *and* the backs sides the pages and how it employed many "polysyllabic words" in the process. The letter's rhetorical construction he stipulated was a model of logic, a form of "analysis" itself, and decidedly superior to a simple description, or to a rambling stream-of-consciousness approach to writing.

He suggested that the letter modeled *deeper* communication, in contrast to the more superficial communications of our day (i.e. social media). He lampooned the Facebook notion of "friends", mockingly repeating the word using air quote hand gestures to mimic the appearance of actual quotation marks. He noted that his granddaughter had "3,228 friends" where she "tell[s] everyone what she had for dinner ... who cares?!" [PD 92 054] By now the sarcasm was unvarnished and it was clear that the lecture had become a bit of sermon vilifying new media as a communication of the mundane, necessarily excessive and insipid.

The Challenge

Sanders told the students that as a society we receive 60 times more information now than we received in 1960`s! And like a steady diet of "Twinkies", all of this information was making us "sick", and addicted. He asked the students (albeit rhetorically) "What is all this doing to us?" He claimed that "cutting edge brain science" had "proven" that this information overload was causing extraordinary amounts of stress, and that these stresses in turn were ultimately releasing "toxins" into our brains. "Every time we send an email, all those little chemicals get injected into us … How are we going to give up our fix? [PD 92 055-56]." He asked that in this age of over-stimulated individuals with "media toxins" [PD 92 069] coursing through their veins, what happens when they don't get their "fix". He asked "what do they do?"   Pausing for effect he responded to his own question, "they say I'm bored." [PD 92 057]

Sander's added that scientists had also found it takes at least 3 days to purge ourselves of these toxins. Consequently, he challenged the class with a project. And to make it all the more tempting he added that the project was an opportunity for bonus marks!   The challenge was "to go a week" without using any electronic devices and to keep a diary of their experiences during that time. Moreover, he said that when it came time to computing the final grades for the course that he would be very generous with those students who had completed this assignment.

This caused an eruption of student responses as they began blurting out responses in rapid succession to this challenge:

-- "I've already done it, a week's vacation in the bush"
-- "Me too, a week on an island"
-- "I just got a cell phone--I'm not on Facebook
-- "I just learned what LMAO meant" [PD 92 069]:.

One student argued, "It's impossible. Just doing on-line classes or registering means you can't go media free!" Seizing upon the critique of technology theme, a 52-year old African-American woman responded that her kids "know better than to text her to say Happy Birthday." She claimed such texts were "disrespectful" and stipulated " I respect myself enough not to accept such messages" [PD 92 070][104].

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[104] Sanders seemed to be taken aback by the possible registration problems that his challenge might pose, admitting it was a "contingency" he had "not thought of." Ultimately he suggested that in terms of

In his critique of modern communication, Sanders noted that texting was causing driving accidents and that "cutting edge brain science" had discovered that, "human beings are designed or built to do only *one* thing at a time … You need to cut out all of the interferences" [PD 92 072]. In a final effort to motivate and to convey both information and wisdom, he concluded the lecture by reminding the students that, "there is never the simplest answer to even the simplest question" [PD 92 073]. Indeed the hundred year-old 15-page personal letter certainly *could* have been interpreted as alluding to such complexity embedded in the simple. Yet Sanders never really elaborated on the details of his challenge, but in a class that was otherwise entirely lecture and devoid of student interaction, the challenge did ensure that the final 5 to 10 minutes were suddenly saturated with a considerable amount of interaction and emotional energy.

Finally, the class was crammed with students in rows of desks too densely packed to be moved. Sanders alluded to the limitations of such a teaching condition and vowed he would weave them all into a "community." [PD 92 048] He also claimed there would be "little lecturing" in this course. Yet on this first day at least, there was very little other than lecturing that occurred – of course other than the flurry of interjections at the very end.

Case Three: Professor Logan

Like the students, I waited in the hallway for someone to open the classroom door -- the same classroom where Professor Sanders had taught the day before. After a few minutes waiting against the wall, trying to fit in with my baggy-style surfer shorts and New England Community College baseball cap, I started to feel a bit self-conscious. Not wanting to draw attention to myself, I left for the bathroom. By the time I returned the students had entered, were sitting quietly at their seats, staring blankly ahead and showing all the signs that this was an 8 a.m. class.

After about 10 minutes of awkward early morning silence, Prof Logan still had not arrived. Many of the students started to get antsy -- taking out their phones, texting, commenting to the person next to them. Finally a woman in the second row in white shorts and a bright yellow t-

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ridding yourself of media toxins it was really the first three days that were the most critical. Hence he suggested that this project could also be done over the Thanksgiving Break, or perhaps some other such strategic time when class was not in session.

shirt with "Long Beach" stamped across the front apparently could take it no longer. She grabbed her yellow nylon drawstring knapsack, swung it over her shoulder, and left. Within a minute, that very same student returned, this time to the head of the class. With her back to the class she placed her pack on the floor, spun around and introduced herself as Professor Logan, *the instructor for the course!*

Professor Logan was a 45 year-old adjunct instructor at NECC who completed her undergraduate degree in Social Theory at one of the New England Seven Sisters schools. She has a Master's degree in Public Administration from an Ivy League institution, and a Ph.D. in Social Policy from a New England private research-intensive university. She too had been teaching Principles of Sociology at NECC for the past three years, but had also taught at other 2-year and 4-year colleges in the region. Before coming to NECC she was a full-time professor of Social Work at a private East Coast University, a position she held for 5 years. By the time I met Professor Logan she was raising her children, "keeping active" in her academic field and teaching three classes of Sociology at NECC: one introductory course on the main campus (the one I observed) another at the satellite campus, and a Sociology of Aging course also on the main campus.

Questioning in the class.

Without dwelling for a moment on the shock of her charade, Prof. Logan jumped quickly into a set of questions (a pattern that would repeat itself over the course of the semester): "Why were you all so orderly?" (Apparently the door to the classroom was not locked, yet everyone had dutifully queued-up in the corridor till a student at last decided to try the door and take a seat). Many students responded that they were simply doing what was expected of them. One student even suggested that to have done otherwise and the "teacher might get *pissed* off". "Yes", Logan replied. Repeating and rephrasing, she continued: "The teacher could get very angry. Or, maybe to do differently from the others is simply not normal. You would be isolating yourself. -- Raise your hand if you want to be isolated from the rest of your classmates?" No students raised their hands. So she pushed the issue further still.

Logan: "Why not present some more radical behavior?"
Student: "You don't want to be the center of other people`s attention"

Logan: "Any other reasons?"

"Did anyone take note of the gender distribution?" she asked.   Instead of answering, some students remarked on the presence of several older-looking students in the classroom, which she in turn re-framed as a question: "Why are we more comfortable with people who are within our own age-range?" After a few more such efforts to get them to reflect on their own experience and to recognize some of the assumptions they made when taking on the role of student, Logan asked the students to interview each other. They were asked to turn to the person sitting next to them and to form a group, with each taking turns to interview one another…

In-Class Introductions and the Challenge.

Again, after processing her charade for a few moments she had asked the students to interview one another. In doing so, the tone of the class turned less formal and more at ease. A rumble of conversations continued for about 10 minutes after which each student, in succession, introduced their partner to the rest of the class. These introductions took a turn for the farcical when turn-taking came to a pair of young male students in the corner. Without the slightest hint of sarcasm, one of the pair described how his partner had originally been a student in good standing at "Yale" -- that was until he "flipped his truck!" At which point, nervous laughter began to ripple across the room.

In light of the student's deadpan delivery, Prof. Logan (and the rest of us) could not be immediately sure as to the accounts veracity, or lack thereof.   Logan eventually responded, "Well, you can't just expect us to leave it there!" The student continued albeit with some relatively unremarkable background details. Next the one who had "flipped his truck", proceeded to introduce his partner. He described him as "smart", though "pretty much of a party animal" and although he currently finds himself here at New England Community College, he had originally been a student at "Harvard"

Introducing course and college. Logan was explicit about wanting to contextualize the course itself.   Although she noted the centrality of the textbook, she did so with a more critical tone.   "This is a beginning course, with a text, and like most introductory texts, it tries to do too much. One of my jobs is to winnow it down."   She was emphatic about the nature of her teaching responsibilities, as well as her role in student learning.

"We will learn a number of basic concepts and then learn to apply them to a number of social institutions. My goal is for you to leave in December, able to look at the world using a variety of sociological tools that you will leave firmly grounded in sociological outlooks on the world."

Professor Logan took numerous opportunities to tell the students how wonderful the course was. She also took several opportunities to stress the special significance of NECC itself, speaking glowingly of the kind of instruction they could expect at this type of an institution: "[As for] the kind of teaching that you can expect … Here at New England Community College, we like teaching!" That said, she also warned the students that this was also *not* High School, and so a new and different sets of expectations would be made of them.

"For example, one of your community college instructors is not going to follow you down the hall to tell you that you could have really done a lot better on the last quiz, come back to my office so that we can work on achieving this. Instead you must figure out what it is that you want and then come and seek me out. That is, the initiative must come from you"

That said, with three children in public school she confided to understanding that such systems do not always seem oriented for individualized attention either. However, she stipulated that "at New England Community College, things are different."

In addition to making a few statements about "sociology as the scientific study of society" she passed out a very comprehensive syllabus. Her syllabus contained a paragraph long summary of learning objectives for *each* chapter in the textbook. She did not however go through much of the syllabus and left most of it for the students to go over in their own time. She laid out a few principles of classroom etiquette (i.e. being on time, being respectful to each other in dialogue). She also told everyone to read the upcoming chapter and she closed the first class with a couple of epistemological questions for the students to keep in mind as they read, "How do we know something?" and "How do you know, you know?"

Finally, along with the conspicuous designed elements of her lesson, her lecturing style nonetheless had a tentative quality to it. In addition to the plodding quality of her speech, the

content itself was delivered in a monotone. However, her pauses seemed like the efforts of someone looking for the *right* word rather than the awkward fumbling of someone looking for something to say. And while much of this plodding quality would continue over the course of the term, as that first day continued, Professor Logan eventually settled into a more natural lecturing style, hands gesticulating, body hunched over slightly with elbows on the lectern.[105]

ANALYSIS

In a day devoted to describing how course content would be approached, each instructor lectured extensively, made reference to their syllabus, and mentioned the importance of reading the textbook. Of course each did so differently. Among some of the commonalities, both Achebe and Sanders provided students with vivid examples for them to consider: Achebe employed imaginary examples to illustrate concepts from the textbook (e.g. the phenomena of drivers dutifully abiding odometers and speed limits); while Sanders offered anecdotes from his past to orient the students to the course (e.g. of wealthy troubled teenagers and their unresponsive parents). Both Logan and Sanders urged their students to recognize the relevance of sociology for their own lives: For example, Sanders remarked that "Most of you are not going to be sociologists, *but* you are going to be doing *something*"; while Logan stipulated that, "[sociology] is germane to your career no matter what you do, as we are all social creatures." Finally, both Achebe and Logan had noted that Sociology was "the science of society". Again, there were also signs of categorical difference among the instructors too. For example, that first day – *only* Achebe jumped into lecturing directly on textbook content; *only* Sanders asked *no* questions of the students and *only* Logan had the students ask questions of each other.

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[105] On a personal note, the class was largely an anxious one for me as I had intended to touch base with Prof Logan before the class began. We had corresponded over email several times, and I had her permission to observe the class, but I had never actually met her, nor had the chance to let her know that I would definitely be in her class that morning. I had imagined correcting all of this in the minutes before class started. Of course, Logan's own pedagogical subterfuge preempted my own plans. As a result, there was a portion of that first day where unbeknownst to Logan, where I was sitting in her class, *as if* a student -- just after she had pretended to be a student herself!

Structural Differences

In addition to the differences in the character of their teaching, marked by the different roles above, each instructor also structured their lesson in markedly different ways. Achebe's was clearly and unequivocally divided into three consecutive sections, each one different in tone, content and purpose. His lecture was clearly divided as follows:

1) go over syllabus;

2) have each student introduce themselves to him;

3) begin lecturing on Chapter One slides.

Sander's lesson, by contrast was a single unit -- a free flowing lecture built up of opening remarks, a series of anecdotes, with comments about course requirements sprinkled throughout. And while the final 'media-free challenge' could have been described as a second structural element, it was likely experienced as something that emerged organically from the lecture rather than an exercise that had been planned earlier, and anticipated by the lecture's structure. Finally, like Achebe, Logan's first day had numerous components:

1) pose as a student;

2) questions and reflections on student experiences of the charade;

3) introductory remarks with reference to syllabus;

4) 5-minute break;

5) student pair interviews;

6) student pairs report back to class;

7) orienting questions for upcoming week's readings.

Previewing Content

Again, only Professor Achebe lectured on course content that was unequivocally and unambiguously from the textbook.[106] Sanders and Logan quite to the contrary made no such explicit efforts to cover textbook content that day. Sanders discussed material that could have been construed as sociological (e.g. modernity and/or cultural change) though he did not

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[106] The series of topics that she began with was the series of topics that the textbook began with as well.

emphasize them as such. Indeed, in the absence of much explanatory context, it is unlikely that his students would have interpreted his stories so either.

Logan, on the other hand initiated a subtle and protracted effort to get the students to understand the concept of "norm." A process that would begin experientially that first day, continue later in the textbook, and culminate in a research paper later still towards the end of the month. Indeed the concept of norm does *not* appear in the textbook till Chapter 2. Yet she began teaching the concept immediately. And rather than provide the students with a definition like the one offered in the textbook, she orchestrated a charade-based-discussion to create the possibility for a deeper (and perhaps more personal) comprehension of the concept later.

Learning here was clearly a process. In this instance, the process entailed engaging the students in questions about the *norms* at stake in her passing as a student and sitting in a teacher-less class. It entailed a preview of their first assignment due three weeks hence -- a 3 to 4 page research paper in which they would be asked to *break* a norm, than comment on its repercussions and their reflections.[107] Finally, she closed the class with a couple of far reaching epistemological remarks that were not only signs of upcoming textbook content, but questions they would need to contemplate for a thoughtful research paper.[108]

At the tail end of Achebe's first class he jumped directly into lecturing on the initial topics in the textbook. To do so, he employed a series of bullet points on PowerPoint slides that mirrored the sequence of topics in textbook -- A format that would come to define all remaining class periods[109]. On the other hand, neither Sanders nor Logan *explicitly* addressed textbook content that first day. Logan by contrast had *implicitly* introduced an important concept from an *upcoming* chapter, more performed and discussed than defined and labeled. From this first day two important themes emerged for all the instructors: (1) how would sociological knowledge be taught during the course and (2) what kind teaching and learning relationship will characterize this teaching approach.

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[107] She also briefly introduced the paper that first day.

[108] She would continue the next lesson on epistemological issues. These issues are indeed discussed in the opening chapter, though she is not following the presentation of the textbook in addressing them immediately.

[109] The *only* exception was the day I introduced myself to the class, explained my project and passed out informed consent papers.

Essentially, each professor alluded to different ways that the teaching of sociology would be approached. For the sake of clarity, I have distinguished these 'approaches' as *showing*, *telling* and *commanding*.

Logan: Showing. Professor Logan's first day was made up of moments that suggested her course would entail *showing* the students what sociology *meant*. The dramatic trickery at the beginning of the lesson suggested that sociological content was not simply something to be given, but something she could cause to be seen. The meanings of sociology are unveiled as part of a grand adventure in knowledge; its meanings so vast they cannot possibly be grasped in a single course. As she stipulated the first day, this was *only* a "beginning" course in Sociology, and so could only cover some of the discipline's most "basic concepts."[110]

Whatever Sociology was that first day, learning it entailed stagecraft, reflection, getting to know one's peers, lots of questions and textbook guidance. Unlike either of the others, she offered a caveat on the use of the textbook. She noted that like most such introductory texts it was characteristically encyclopedic, and endeavored to "do too much." As a result, her job was to provide guidance in its use. Essentially, she introduced herself as their guide, for the guide.

Finally, as if to underscore the epistemological issues at stake in the course, and contextualize the research paper due three weeks hence, she asked the students to keep two questions in the back of their minds as they read next week's reading assignment: "How do we know something?" and "How do you know, you know?" Similarly, unlike the other instructors, she took neither the *course* nor the *institution* for granted. Instead of jumping right into the task of knowing sociology, she pointed out how this was but an introductory course in sociology, and NECC would be a special context within which to learn it.

Sanders: Telling. Professor Sanders' message about knowledge implied that whatever sociology was, it *could* be told to you (Again, this was certainly more by implication, than by claim). In Sanders' hands, Sociology seemed less a discrete discipline to be understood, than an

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[110] Indeed, in breaking the norms of teaching to teach the concept of *norm*, and, regarding her approach to teaching in general, I liken her (albeit loosely) to the trickster characters of mythology who often play tricks or otherwise disobey normal rules and conventional behavior but usually (though not always) to ultimately positive and educational effect.

important set of orientations for a larger view of the world.   Unlike the other two, the discipline itself was rarely referred to by name. In contradistinction to Logan, it certainly was not a grammatical subject in very many (if any) sentences. Its principal reference (if perhaps its only reference) came when the textbook was held up as the *bible* for the course, which students would be expected to bring to every class.[111]

In addition, whatever Sociology was, it *was* something like History. Not only was Sanders a history instructor at the college[112], but he also explained how in his history course he usually brought an old-letter to class! He alluded to the significance of the letter, describing how its sophistication entailed a level literacy unimaginable by the standards of our day. The example was to have been all the more striking as it was some 15 pages long and dealt only with mundane quotidian matters. Yet the letter's relevance for sociology was never really made clear. Indeed, the relevance of many of his anecdotes for sociology rarely made explicit. Still, we can surmise that his stories were efforts to place social phenomena or issues within larger, more historical contexts.   Like his introductory remarks at the beginning of class: telling the students that the packed community college classroom of which they were a part was itself a "sociological phenomena" -- how back in the "old days" such a class might get "maybe 12 students", while 'today' with close to 40 students sitting at desks there was only standing room remaining. Thus, sociology was indirectly portrayed as the putting of superficial observations into larger contexts, and, that he (with the help of the textbook) could tell those contexts to you.

It is important to note that Sanders did *not* bring in the letter that day. He told the students of its contents instead. Similarly, he told the students that in spite of their larger numbers and the configuration of desks in the classroom, he would strive to weave them into a "community", and, that there would be very little lecturing in the course. However no opportunities for student interaction were provided that day, much less significant opportunities for them to interact with him either (short of interruptions).

Sanders' anecdotes reminded students not only that rich people had problems too, but that as a society we are overdosing on information, as if getting high on drugs, and becoming insufferably "bored" when we don't get our fix!   I take his anecdotes as reflecting his interest in

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[111] In light of Sanders' own past, his pastoral intentions (Chapter Six) his sermon-like lectures that do not anticipate questions from the class qua congregation, but often uses questions to largely rhetorical ends, in my notes he was likened to a preacher.

[112] This was a fact already known by several students.

making sociology a vehicle for conveying wisdom (See Chapter Six). Indeed his concluding quip to students before they exited the classroom was a call for thoughtful reflection, reminding them that "there is never the simplest answer to even the simplest question." [PD 92 073]. If Logan's parting comment was meant to remind the students of the difficulty of even knowing what *is*, Sanders seemed to suggest that wisdom could be found in the larger contexts of even the simplest questions.

Achebe: Commanding. For a student in Achebe's class, whatever sociology was, it was something they could be commanded to learn. Several times they were ordered *not* to show up for class during test days: "Don't show up" he would say or, "I don't want you to be here", each was repeated several times during the lesson. They were told *not* to bring their cell phones to class and that that they *should not* expect to reach him under *any* circumstances on Mondays, Wednesdays or Fridays. After completing their computer tests, he was definitive both on paper, and aloud when he said "Don`t use SAVE ALL. Finally in a class dense in edicts and responsibilities, he reminded the students that they had nonetheless been granted a "privilege" to take their exams on-line.

Of the three classes, no class made such a spectacle of the syllabus. Achebe's class was silent as it was ritually distributed among the students, its image projected onto a screen at the head of the class, with its litany of commandments examined line-by-line together. The solemnity of this ritual was made all the more explicit when Achebe remarked that the syllabus was in reality a "contract". Half of the class time that day was spent going over the terms of this contract. A second phase of the day involved him asking the students one by one for their names, and for where they were from. The final and shortest phase of the class, entailed reverting their eyes back to the screen for a series of PowerPoint slides on the textbook. The slides began at "Chapter One" and most students began to copy them[113].

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[113] However in light of his back and forth play between the juridical and the comical, the way in which he comes to stand for common sense and honesty, and the ribald entertaining quality of his lessons, in earlier analyses I had labeled him the jester.

A second significant theme referred to how instructors and students were to be related. In particular,

Sanders. Professor Sanders *told* his students he was "not their adversary," that he was on their side, that they had nothing to fear and that they could do it (i.e. succeed in this course). And though his anecdotes may have had a somewhat veiled connection to sociology, one of his underlying themes was that he *too* had had experience with alienating educational institutions, that he's lived through them and he is back to tell the tale (See Chapter Four). He's 'retuned' to tell the students that they needn't worry about where they've come from; money is its own curse, even the wealthy have problems as well as their own "baggage"! In addition to the empathy he hoped to convey in his anecdotes, in a more direct moment he simply told them,

> " I've been teaching a long time and I've come a long way in my thinking about it, and I think that I've come to understand some of the hurdles you are facing." [above].

Sanders sought to portray himself as an experienced and sophisticated version of the students themselves, modeling for them what they could know if they followed his lead.

Achebe. Professor Achebe had a very different first day.   If Sanders sought to strike a sympathetic chord, Achebe's tone, (at least initially) was decidedly more distant. The day unfurled in two contrasting parts: the first very formal (befitting a legal relationship), the second very jocular (befitting a joking relationship)[114].

Achebe spent a notable amount of effort that day accentuating for the differences between him and his students. Whether it was his own transnational movements or his academic trajectory culminating in a doctoral degree, his life was not presented as if it overlapped with the students.' Not only was it clear that Achebe and his students lived radically different lives, but it also seemed that the only space he was prepared to share with them was the classroom! In an apparent effort to get personal information from Achebe, Cheeky-boy asked, "I'm assuming you don't commute from *East Africa*?" Achebe flatly responded, "Yeah I don't live around here. I

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[114] The first refers to the creation of rigid categories; the humor of the second depends on the willingness to violate them.

live in Mainsbridge. I run away from my students. I tell you, if a student moved into my neighborhood, I would move."

This social distancing theme was also reflected in a course that seemed *not* to maximize its opportunities for contact with the students. In point of fact, much of the class time was spent trying to prove to the students that though there were 23 class periods listed on the syllabus, they were only expected to attend 16 of them! (One of the class periods fell on the Thanksgiving break, and 6 other class periods were designated as *test days*). Thus on the syllabus, six days looked as if they were actual class days, when students would have been expected to attend class. Again a significant portion of class time (and the lion share of the attention devoted to the syllabus) was spent trying to convince students *not* to come to class on *test days*!

As test days were *not* the only days that the tests could be taken, convincing *all* students not to show up was not a simple matter. The actual class period on 'testing days' represented when the test would be *opened* for students – when they could log on and take it. Indeed most of the time, the students had until the end of the weekend to do their tests.[115] It was possible that some students may have felt uncomfortable with this approach, and/or had misgivings about the use of time-tested computer exams and would have preferred to take them during the regularly scheduled class time on paper. It was also conceivable that for students who were already on campus, in light of chaotic home lives and/or demanding work schedules, might have preferred set testing dates and times on campus. Convincing such students of the error in such thinking was a major objective of the first day. Moreover, the flexibility of the on-line testing system (itself a principal theme of the lecture) would have permitted him to test the students at home, or wherever, and still not have to lose a lesson in the process.[116]

Similarly, Achebe also made it clear that if a student was looking for him he or she could *only* find him on Tuesdays and the Thursdays – the days he was on campus teaching. He was emphatic about not looking for him on any other days. He told the students: "Don't come! That`s the beauty of teaching. I don't have to be here unless I'm engaged." Such exchanges often made the students chuckle. Of course their laughter could have been a response to the humor inherent in an unconventionally honest confession, or, a cover for anxieties associated

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[115] As will be discussed in Chapter 6, these tests entailed a 60-minute clock that once started, could not be paused or stopped.

[116] Regrettably, I did not ask him why he did not use class time for some other pedagogical purpose other than simply giving it back to the students as a free time.

with getting unexpectedly hurt. This notion of a contractual, transactional, relationship defined by distinct roles and responsibilities between instructors and instructed would last undiminished for the remainder of the term.

Logan. Professor Logan's discussion of Sociology and social distance was problematized dramatically from the very beginning. Sitting in class pretending to be a student, waiting with the rest for an obviously late instructor, then emerging from the students to assume the role of teacher, suggested (at the very least) that she could have been one of them. To be even more explicit she followed up her deception with questions on the assumptions we make about age and social distance --- In what situations does age matter? How and when do we recognize it? Indeed, what is this classroom space with all of these unwritten rules or norms? Logan emphatically problematized her own appearance before the classroom, and used her entrance to *show* the students the degree to which there is social knowledge below their conscious awareness. Her theatrical beginning presaged an approach to the course she would often use over the term: efforts to offer alternative presentations of the meanings in the textbook.

Summary

It is worth noting that there were several congruencies between how instructors conceived of their teaching and how they taught their first day of class. Achebe's no-nonsense tone that categorically distinguished teaching from learning was reflected in the efforts he took that first day to categorically distinguish himself from his students. The efforts Sanders took the first day to identify with his students resonated with a conception of teaching that focused as much on pastoral care as it did on sociology. Logan's efforts to dramatically unveil sociology dovetailed with her belief that an instructor was always looking for new ways to help the student make connections. To the question of whether or not a student had acquired the course content, each instructor's approach itself manifested its own rejoinder. Students might indeed be provided with content, but for Achebe, do they get good grades? For Sanders, do they become wiser? For Logan, are they able to connect it to their own lives?

Finally, if indeed the textbook would play a central role in the course to come, the treatment of it was qualitatively different among the instructors. For Achebe the textbook was rarely mentioned, but clearly constituted the grounds for the lecture slides. For Sanders, the text

was elevated by way of a small brief spectacle, but largely ignored afterwards. For Logan, the textbook was a topic of discussion, critiquing it, saying that it had both positive and problematic dimensions—the latter tied to its encyclopedic quality, through which she would have to guide the students.

In sum, the first day appeared to lay a foundation for what would follow. While Sanders had tried to *tell* his students that he was one of them, Logan instead tried to *show,* under what circumstances, she could be one of them. Achebe by contrast sought to *prove* that he was *not* one of them and that Sociology was to be presented by distant authority figure. In this chapter, we have begun to see how in spite of the variation in teaching approaches displayed among the instructors, Logan had begun to distinguish herself from Achebe and Sanders, by suggesting that teaching of sociology was a strategic unveiling process. In the next chapter we see how the grounds for teaching content laid on the first day was extended to the actual teaching of content over the course of the semester, how in spite of entirely divergent interests (e.g. separating from students vs. identifying with them) Achebe and Sanders respectively could nonetheless have a critical feature of their teaching approach in common.

Chapter 6
Instructors' Approaches to Teaching
Introductory Sociology Content

This chapter addresses the question: *how do instructors using encyclopedic textbooks approach teaching introductory sociology at a New England community college?* I examine the approach to teaching instructors adopted *while* teaching; compared to the preceding chapter, the focus here is more general and tries to represent the teaching that characterized the *term as a whole*. I examine students' perspectives to juxtapose with my own view as participant observer. This also illustrates diverse, divergent perspectives within the classroom. Again, I examine each instructor separately before discussion themes that emerged when comparing the cases.

CASE ONE

Achebe's approach to teaching Introductory Sociology at NECC

Laying down laws, granting privileges and taking names, conveyed a paternalistic dimension to the first day that for me, was hard to look past. Yet a counterpoint to the occasionally authoritarian tone of his lecture or the uninterrupted flow of slides through the course, was the sporadic banter that broke out between Professor Achebe and a handful of students who noted how "funny" Achebe was (see below).

The Lecture Experience

Every Tuesday and Thursday at 12:30 Professor Achebe waited for his students to trickle in. The lights to the classroom would be dimmed and the blinds already drawn. First he would take the "roll." The class largely sat silently, each student waiting their turn to respond. Afterwards, a few moments were usually set aside to discuss the mechanics of the online tests: reminding the students when they would be available, or ascertaining who in the class had missed the window to take them. "Are there any questions from last week?" he would ask. Most of the time there was no response and he would simply return to his series of slides and continue from where he left off. A few students would usually trickle in a minute or two late at which

point he would stop the lecture, check them off as present, and then resume.

Achebe's particular coverage of the textbook, with its unmistakably dominant lesson structure of the PowerPoint slide-driven lecture was reminiscent of what Grubb and Associates (1999) had infelicitously dubbed as the "textbook march." However the textbook was not physically present in his course. The students did not appear to bring it with them to class, and very rarely (if ever) was it mentioned in lecture; however, the slides (and accompanying notes) clearly mirrored the textbook, just as the structure of the course itself. Consequently the textbook, in spite of its physical absence, had a strong phenomenal presence in the classroom.

With a remote control in hand, he would read the bulleted-points, often providing embellishment or examples to help illuminate. Occasionally he would reiterate a point by writing it out on the blackboard. Sometimes, he would pause the parade of slides and begin with the phrase, "Where I come from ... ". These were segues to vignettes from his childhood growing up in rural east Africa that usually ended-up as humorous tales of striking cultural difference.

Other than his voice, the class was usually silent. Students listened, most seemed in a rush to copy down the slides before he moved on. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter 4, getting the notes to the students was just as much of a priority for Achebe as it was for the students to obtain them (see below). Most interactions between Achebe and the students erupted spontaneously. Yet a few were inserted into the lecture by design. The last slide of the chapter usually contained a controversial claim that asked the students for their opinions, or for them to debate (e.g. Is homosexuality something that is learned, or is it genetic?"). A time of "3 minutes" was typed in parentheses at the bottom of these slides, reminding the students of the time constraints for this portion of the lecture.

Again, with his tongue and cheek manner and the banter-like back and forth he facilitated, there was a humorous aspect to the class. And that while the textbook may have been ever-present in course content, it was never physically manifest, but instead its importance seemed to have been supplanted by Achebe's own slide-born-notes. However the translation from textbook to slides or notes also seemed occasionally problematic, as in the chapter on sexuality when his notes said that radical feminism was the "bad feminism", or in the Chapter on Education when he asserted without qualification that public schools and private schools were of equivalent quality. Nevertheless his interpretations of textbook content is a question examined empirically

in the next chapter.

Humor in the Classroom. Again, there was an unmistakable core *structure* to the course and without 'real' exception, students arrived, sat and copied[117]. Nevertheless Humorous banter-like conversation would occasionally erupt. Indeed many students would comment on it. No story was more heartily received, or more frequently revived, than the question of how many wives or children he had in Africa. Its origins lay in the first day of class when Cheeky-boy and Achebe had matched wits. After Achebe had systematically obtained everyone's names and hometowns, Cheeky-boy seemed determined to elicit some personal information as well.   Thus the class came to know that Achebe came from East Africa via Canada, and from Canada he move to New England. It was in Canada that he took his first and second degrees, but he completed his doctoral work at the state's flagship research university.

While Achebe was still sketching his own educational profile, "Cheeky-boy" interjected, "How old are you?" "I told you, I'm old. I am not young". Achebe said. He went on to describe his "in-state" and pop-culture credentials, pointing out that his children had also attended the state`s flagship public research university, and that he was a Bulldog fan "through and through"[118]. His avowed allegiance to the State University's athletic mascot brought chuckles from the students. "Cheeky-boy" changed the ground for the discussion asking him, "How many kids do you have?"

> Achebe: "Ah, for that, ask me in *East Africa!*" (This got some laughter from the class.)

> Cheeky-boy: "Well, can you count them then on your fingers?" (Asked as if pleading for some sort of information.)

> *Achebe bobbed his head as if he was counting inside it; he paused, looked to his fingers as if counting on them too, then started to raise his leg as if he had run out of fingers to count on and had to resort to other body parts. The whole class laughed*

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[117] Not all students copied slides. And not all students were writing. Nonetheless, a strong assumption in the classroom was that students would 'get the slides down'. At any one time approximately ¾ of the students appeared to be copying the slides from the screen. There were only two exceptions to this pattern. The first referred to the day when I introduced myself and collected informed consent forms.
[118] The name of the actual team mascot has been changed.

heartily!

Many in the class found such intermingling of humor with Achebe's African background to be one of the more significant dimensions of the course[119]. Twenty one-year old Aaron was one of the courses numerous boosters I interviewed. He appreciated Achebe's glib, if occasionally unorthodox approach. Aaron was transferring to a 4-year college the next semester. He had gone to Arizona State University straight from high school but returned to NECC for financial reasons. By the time I met Aaron he had been enrolled at NECC for three semesters. About Professor Achebe he said,

> "I love the professor, Mr. Achebe. He's hilarious. Even though he gets off topic and like talking about "weed" it's just like, 'all right', I mean 'really? … Whatever! You know I think most people have done it before, you don't have to base the whole class off of it, we already know what (most of us) what goes on there, and stuff like that. It's just, going off topic sometimes. It's kind of like all right. For the most part, it's just fun to see his life experiences, whether they are true or not. Just how he relates his culture to ours. He can bring a lot to the plate just because he's from a different society. There's a lot of interesting things about him. So he can bring a lot of entertaining, a lot of interest. Just from that fact. [PD 163: 44-51]

Besides perhaps his occasional choice of example, Aaron finds little to criticize in the course or its teaching.

Nineteen-year-old Brittany had a very similar outlook. She too was recently enrolled at a year 4-year college. Academically, however, she had not done very well while she was there and thought it was good idea to return to NECC to 'get her stuff together' yet go back to that same 4-

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[119] It is important to note that there may be a racial undertone to this class: that Achebe's humor, his use of it, the kind of humor he invoked and its reception by the students could have reflected an implicitly racialized role and a racist society. It was not always possible to distinguish if students were laughing at him, or with him; however, from my vantage it seemed like most cases leaned towards the latter. But I cannot be certain. Similarly, the authoritarian and authoritative stance that marked his class could have been a response to a racialized teacher-student relationship. Moreover, it was difficult to distinguish reactions to his teaching (e.g. Cheeky boy) as either reactions to an excessively rigid approach and top-down manner of instruction or a disrespectful attitude born of a racist society. Again, I cannot be certain. In my opinion, student responses seemed more the former than the latter.

year college for her senior year. When I asked her about the course she said,

> "I like it. I think he is a good teacher. I like how he can like tell stories and like, really a lot of things. Like *he is not just strictly reading, out of the book*, off of his slides. Like he knows a lot about what he is talking about. And like he puts things in different words, so you better understand like what the different things are. I just like when he relates things … like what`s like going on with families, and you know, talking about parents and things like that. And like he'll tell his stories of like him growing up."

Achebe's 'Notes' Replace the Textbook. Yet another point of consensus surrounded the supreme significance of Achebe's notes. If the focus of every lesson was the power point slides projected to the head of the class, the focus of the course was the *notes* that represented them. Moreover, these all-important PowerPoint slides were themselves stored in the Blackboard universe where they could be downloaded as notes.[120] *All* of the students I interviewed remarked how they had eventually recognized that 'the notes' were of utmost importance and that the textbook was irrelevant to success in the class. [121] Even Brittany who believed she might have done better in class had she ever consulted the textbook nonetheless recognized that it was also unnecessary to do so.

> Brittany: … Like on the first quiz, I totally did not know what to expect, but now that I know how he sets it up; like it`s almost like he's just going right through the chapter in order.[122] So like I read through all of my notes, and like I underline certain things …"

> Me: These are your notes from the overheads. What about some of the notes the other notes? He`s got those additional notes that are also available online. Do you ever download any of those and look at them?

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[120] There were purportedly different versions of the notes also stored online as well.

[121] Though I did not check with all the students, my impression was this was the case with most as well. It is also possible that some students would see an educational significance to the textbook even if it was not significant to their success in the class--- however would have appeared as exceptions to the rule.

[122] Here was a dimension of resemblance or *iconicity* to be discussed later in the chapter. The order of questions on the test, resemble the order of topics in the textbook, and thus the textbook is symbolically or semiotically (see below) present in the tests themselves.

Brittany: No.

Me: So, like the text, you haven`t found that those were necessary in order to do [well]?

Brittany: Not really. Pretty much everything is just right off his slides. So like I just write it down and listen to what he has to say, and just kind of like absorb it as much as I can.

Of the students I interviewed in Achebe's class, only Betsy had a negative attitude towards him and the course. The rest were largely positive.[123] She was also one of the few students I interviewed who said they read the textbook – even after she recognized it was unimportant to doing well in the class.   Betsy was a fast-talking, highly verbal, self-assured 26-year old single mother returning to school to become a teacher[124]. She was at NECC to get her associates degree and transfer, but she was also there to learn. When I asked her about how Achebe approached the class she said,

> "Like he pretty much printed the notes that he would show in class every day; they were on-line; it was the exact same notes. And I just felt as though we were reading them, every class, and there really was no discussion. We were just reading the notes." [PD 162]

Alternatively 24-year old Raven, with her copious notebook notes[125] and enthusiasm for the course, had appreciated the redundancy built into the different sets of notes. As she saw it, repeating the information in several different forms ensured that it stuck.

> "Sometimes the two differ, in the order that is, but it`s the *same information*. And it's

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[123] Ayshe (below) could be categorized as ambivalent, as she did have misgivings about how short time Achebe, and with how he had phrased his exam questions. She seemed to suggest that there were flaws in how he taught the course, but that they could be easily remedied. Betsy seemed to suggest that the remedies would not have been so simple.

[124] She was also notable for fact that her own parents had graduated from a 4-year college (See Appendix). This appeared to be a rarity among many of the students I interviewed.

[125] Raven actually shared her notebook notes with me for this project

given to us three different ways. … He has `lecture` notes, `important notes,` and then a `chapter summary`. And then you can print off the PowerPoints themselves. So, technically you can have, like the PowerPoints themselves and then 3 different ways. So, in total the notes are given to you 4 times. So I mean really…" [PD:98 148]

This last clause was *not* a criticism. To the contrary, she wanted to underscore the lengths to which Professor Achebe had gone on behalf of his students[126]. That said, Raven too came to recognize that the textbook was not critical.

"…I just kind of let my textbook sit on a shelf, and I just never really bothered to really look through it again. *Because* after taking two of his tests, and seeing, *wow*, everything like, is *directly*, like what is *in* my notes. I was like; I don`t really feel I have to read it." [PD 98: 158]

Raven recalled no compelling reading experiences with the textbook. She claimed, "like any other textbook, you know, (pause) they are not fun to read! They are books for school" [PD:98 158]. For Raven, there was no reason to search the textbook for explanations or guidance; Achebe himself was *more than* sufficient: "I think like he does a pretty good job of explaining everything in class. So I don`t normally feel like, lost, after one of his classes [PD:98 146]. In my interviews with Raven during and after the class was through, she felt that Professor Achebe was second to none: "I just feel he gives you everything you need to really do well." [PD 98: 123-125]. However the 'redundancy' of the textbook was perhaps less appreciated, and three weeks into the course she sold back her textbook.

Achebe's problematic readings of the textbook? However for those few who had followed along in the textbook for a spell, the additional information did not seem redundant. Betsy often read the textbook and by and large she liked it. Yet she recalled looking to it precisely because she had found some of Achebe's explanations lacking –indeed she had suspicions about his notes. Early in the course she checked his notes against the textbook, and

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[126] The notion of sociology as information, the importance of information redundancy for its recall, that he has given the students everything they need to succeed, and the identification of test success with learning, are all assumptions that many of the students in this course come to share with Professor Achebe.

found that the slides he had obviously distilled from them were superficial.

> Betsy: So then I would take them [the notes]. Go back, and like reference them to the book, and see how the book was explaining them versus his explanations and things.

> Me: And what did you find?

> Betsy " I thought that his slides were, umm, like, over. I don`t know how to explain this, um, like kind of *overly simplifying things*.   And, sometimes he doesn't even, sometimes I felt that he takes things like *too literally*.  Like when I would ask questions, and I would ask `ok, so is it this, or this?` He was like, `well, the book says this`.  But that`s, the book is even not explaining it. Or not explaining it in, uh, you know, in real terms … And sometimes I just think that he reads things and then (pausing for effect) that`s it! Like there! But he doesn't process it. *So he might just be telling you what it says, but not what it means necessarily* [my italics] [PD 162 43-48]"

Thus Betsy made two very strong claims to be interrogated more fully later in the next chapter. However they bear listing now: (1) that Achebe was not always able to elaborate on distinctions drawn in the textbook and (2) that Achebe read the textbook too simplistically, or as she put it, "too literally" -- as if he was not fully "processing" the content. Hence according to Besty, Professor Achebe was able to convey a sense for what the textbook "says" just not for what it "means." (This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter).

Again however, the more dominant experience among the students was a sense that Professor Achebe had left them with *everything* they needed to do well in the course[127]. For example, although Brittany had *not* sold back her textbook, like Raven, she too had neglected it. And like Raven, she too felt that Achebe's teaching was near flawless, that any deficiencies in her learning or grades were entirely her own fault:

> Brittany: "There's not really anything I don`t understand.  I think like right now my grade is at the level it`s at because I`m not putting.  It`s because of *me*. Like *he`s* teaching

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[127] Here too the students seemed to share Achebe's assumption that to have learned is to have done well in the course.

everything he needs to teach and he`s provided us with the book, and the notes, and everything we need to do. It's my, like *me.* I'm the one who should be reading the book. I`m the one who should be like taking better notes say and *actually* studying for the quizzes, as opposed to just reading through [the notes]. It`s in my hands. I can get the grade I want to get, but, I, just don`t.

Me: So as far as you are concerned, if there is any deficiency in this class it's all you.

Brittany: Yeah

Me: That`s a lot. You should ease up on yourself again.

Brittany: Well it is, like that`s how you have to think of it. The teachers are providing you with everything you need to do. It's the time and effort that you, like what you take out of it. I`m not putting in as much time or effort as I should be. Like I just don`t."

On the Absence of Dialogue. However one thing *everyone* I interviewed agreed on was that there was insufficient time allotted for dialogue in Achebe's class. Betsy, who was already critical of his teaching, thought the class had "no discussion", whatsoever! Even Aaron who "loved" Achebe, loved Sociology and found very little to dislike about the course also confessed that he too lamented the paucity of dialogue "I just wish there was more positive input from the class" [PD 163: 112]. However unlike Betsy, Aaron placed responsibility for its absence squarely on the shoulders of his peers:

> "A lot of people are afraid to speak or a lot of people just don`t care enough. It`s just, you know, that extra, what is it … human or social science or something credit. It's just that *extra credit* so people don`t really put too much into it ... a lot of people don`t put too much interest into it" *my emphasis* [PD: 163 114-116]

Ayshe certainly did not see it that way. Ayshe was a very large 30-year old African-American single mother, and one of only two visible minorities in the class. Her grades were

considerably worse than the others I interviewed. In spite of her efforts she had received marks of 52, 60 and a 68 on her first three exams. As a result she already knew that she would have to re-take this course if she was going to get into nursing. The cause of her problems in this course she believed were two fold – the teaching and the testing.   Ayshe was very distressed over lost opportunities for classroom discussion. She felt that had Achebe allowed for more conversation she would have learned the content better. Specifically she said,

> "… and when he adds more of *that* [e.g. "conversations", "debates"] in the class, it makes us more knowledgeable of the subject that he is talking about, you know, because we are putting our own thoughts into our own experiences in with it. So that helps us link, you know. So when we do have that test question we are more, 'oh wait, I understand that question', you know what I mean?" [PD 163 103]

Not only did Ayshe find amount of classroom discussion unacceptably minimal, but she was particularly perturbed by what she saw as Achebe's efforts to *suppress* it:

> " … What I don`t like is when he, when it  [conversation] gets started, and like it's going to start doing that and he cuts it off.  And then it goes back to the sl (presumably `slides`).  And it's like: `Um, I thought we were just (she pauses, and then in a tone of resignation she says) ok". [PD 163 104]

Ayshe mentioned how she was so upset once that she actually came to be jealous of these students taking the online version course, who she felt, ironically, had more time for discussion than students who actually sat at their desks in classrooms.

> Ayshe: Remember he said, he put up on the board, `Discussion topic`? Yes we started discussing, we only discussed *half* of the question, number one. But he gave the online people 3 days! A week!
>
> Me: You guys got three minutes.

Ayshe: Exactly! (she giggles) And then we only discussed half of the subject. We didn`t even discuss half of the question, and he completely dismissed it and went to the next thing. And I was like, what happened to the other half of the question? And you know, gosh, only a couple of us got to make our point of view on it (in hindsight, she chuckles at the unfairness of the situation).

Me: It seems that his heart wasn't really into the group discussions.

Ayshe: Exactly! It sure wasn't! [PD 163 106-117]

Assessing, and the Assessment Environment

The syllabus said that, "Tests and exams will consist of *objective* multiple choice questions based on assigned readings and lecture notes" [PD106]. It appeared from the syllabus that 6 class periods would be set aside for multiple-choice tests. Specifically,

1. There were four regular tests, each covering two consecutive chapters in the textbook. 60 minutes were allotted for each of these tests.
2. One midterm covered three chapters, and 90 minutes was allotted to complete it.
3. A final exam covered the final four chapters and 120 minutes was allotted to complete it.

Essentially, students were given 30 minutes to answer 25 questions related to a single chapter. Hence, like the overall teaching situation itself, the testing structure was uncomplicated and streamlined. It looked as follows:

Date/Test	Chapters Covered	Minutes Allotted
9/16 -- Test 1	1,2	60
9/30 -- Test 2	3,4	60
10/14 -- Test 3	5,6	60
12/21 (Midterm)	7,8,9	90

| 11/18 -- Test 4 | 10,11 | 60 |
| 12/10-12/13 (Final) | 12,13,14,15 | 120 |

Students were told the times at which they could log into their courses to take these tests. Ultimately, 85% of the overall grade was based on these tests. The remaining 15% of the overall grade was allotted for participation. This was the only means of evaluating students in this course.

The *Blackboard* online learning system managed the delivery *and* the correction of these tests. These multiple-choice tests themselves entailed selecting one of 4 possible answers of varying lengths (i.e. answers could be single words, phrases or a sentences).

To be sure that everyone was clear on how the online testing would go as well as how much of a privilege it was to take them, Achebe checked with the class one last time. "Does everyone understand me?" [PD 96: 015]. "Cheeky-boy" in his cap, sun glasses, and rock concert T-shirt responded "cool" and with an affirming (if not slightly sarcastic) thumbs-up. [PD 96: 015].

Achebe mentioned that another important advantage of the Blackboard online testing system was that it let him know just how long each student took to complete their exams. Later in the course he even warned the students that the time they took to answer the question was a sign of how much studying they had done prior to taking the exam: "If you use more time, I'll know."

He also explained in my interview with him that the use of multiple-choice examinations was an effort to accommodate the different "learning styles" of students, suggesting that some students preferred essays, while others did not -- alluding to an earlier time when he had offered the students a choice of being assessed by one or the other. Apparently, the students had overwhelmingly chosen the latter. He also remarked that if students had approached him with a preference for essay tests, he was prepared to oblige. I asked if that had in fact ever happened, he said "No."[128]

On the one hand he also suggested that a use of online exams was a concession to the complicated lives of students. Yet on at least one occasion Professor Achebe admonished the students to make sure that in spite of their busy lives, they needed to find a peaceful moment and

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[128] From what I observed, students are no longer asked if they would prefer to be assessed with essays.

space within which they could complete their exams. "You cannot attend to other things when you are writing the exam...things on the stove, your baby, NO!" [PD 96:013].

The online testing experience. Moreover, the Blackboard system was a unique testing experience. Students would log in to their test, commence answering, while a clock ticked down to zero in the screen's corner. For many that I spoke to this was an off-putting experience. For Ayshe, the timed aspect of the exams was already distressing, but for her, the tortuous wording of the questions themselves compounded her distress. In her estimation they were unnecessarily ornate and refined:

> "I think this class is only hard because of the way he states his questions on these exams. He states like he`s talking to people from Yale -- first I have to decipher the question and then answer it correctly."

Ayshe recalled an occasion when she had gone back to a question after the exam was graded to figure out how she could have done so poorly:

> "And then, when I go back, and I look at the question, and the question says something like (*in a plodding, affected manner she says*] `Oh, that picture, on that white wall is by itself, is secluded in, but it needs to have some dee-cor` (i.e. décor). [*Abruptly speeding up her speech she continues*] Instead of just saying, `the picture`s on a white wall need some decoration!` [*said matter-of-factly; with the emphasis in the original*]. You know what I`m saying? And I`m like, what the hell you trying to say?"[129] PD 164 83-84

Between the timed dimensions of Achebe's tests and the difficulty she had understanding his questions, her testing experiences were very frustrating. Moreover, she was acutely dispirited believing that unhurried, she would have been able to figure out the correct answers. She summed up her dilemma thus:

> "He [Achebe] gives us an hour for 50 questions. So that gives us a minute, a little bit

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[129] Ayshe was able to get credit at NECC for the English Composition 101 course she took at the private 4-year institution 10 years ago.

over a minute for each question. Well, if it takes me 2 minutes to try to figure out what the hell you are asking, I`m already going to skip half of the questions, because I`d rather get a wrong answer than get a zero for not answering a question. So, I`m trying to beat the time and I`m reading fast. I`m not fully understanding the question and I`m getting wrong answers, because I`m putting wrong answers cuz I`m not fully understanding the question … And then I go back and I`m like damn I got that answer wrong! *Only* because I was reading the question too fast to understand what the hell he was trying to ask me, and that's` why I'm getting a 52, a 60 and a 68 on my exams (her emphasis)."

Although Brittany and Aaron appeared relatively accepting of their accomplishments in the course, they too did not care for the automated testing environment. Aarron confessed that he never was the "best test taker in the world" and Brittany claimed, "that [she] was "not a fan of on-line tests". She said,

"… I like that they are online, that you can sit at your house and take it, but like, reading it on the screen and having that timer counting down. I`m just like, uhhhh (she shudders)"

Of course this is not to say that there was no variation in the testing experience. Betsy for her part found the exams astoundingly easy. Even without reading the textbook or the notes she felt one should still pass them easily.

"I don't know if you could see the exams that he [Achebe] was giving out or not ... If you printed out those sheets then you could sit there, take off the exam, and just like check off things and get a 90 or better. I didn't understand how people were doing poorly in the class. I talked to a couple of people that were like, ah, I got like a 59 on that. And I'm like, 'How?' (as she mimicked being flummoxed). You didn't even have to do anything! It was like multiple-choice and an answer sheet is right there! Like I don't understand. [PD 162]

Of course this deeply contrasts with Ayshe's experiences[130]. Ultimately Betsy reasoned that she must have greater background knowledge than some of her peers and that perhaps this explained how they could fail what she felt were truly un- failable exams.

> "I think that it's because I have some like basic knowledge of the subject, some basic understanding of stuff." [PD 162]

Alas, in the final analysis, Achebe's testing did not inspire Betsy to do her best. She got an A in the course, but confesses that her reading "tapered off" as she realized she could think her way to correct answers most of the time. And towards the end of the course when I asked her if she had nonetheless learned a lot in the class she said,

> "I didn't, in all honesty, I probably didn't retain any of the knowledge because of the way that it was taught, because I really wasn't required to know anything in order to do well in the class. "[PD 162]

CASE TWO

Sanders' *approach to teaching* **Introductory Sociology at NECC**

Over the course of the semester, there was a conspicuous and relatively invariant structure to Professor Sander's class too. Yet his 'textbook march' was different from Achebe's. Just about all of his lessons were made of a small invariable set of components: quotations from the textbook, personal anecdotes, historical narratives, or forms of testimony. Sanders classes were usually a 70-minute series of oscillations between text and tale. Verily, Professor Sanders' own life was an inescapable plot line of the course. In point of fact, several students stipulated that they felt more comfortable in their knowledge of his personal life than of anything sociological. Unflattering and debatable though this characterization may have been, it attests to the powerful role that Sanders' own life played in the course's content.

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[130] This also reflects the extreme inequalities of academic background that are possible in a community college classroom. Creating a viable curriculum amidst such extremes seems challenging at the very least.

A leitmotif of Sanders' life-story and a source for many classroom anecdotes were his 35 years of experience as minister at a Congregationalist church. Most classes had at least one example that began with the phrase, "back in my ministerial days … ," referring to his last full time occupation[131]. From our first interview he had been explicit about the religious inspirations for his teaching (See Chapter 4).[132] As someone who had been to Divinity school, led his own congregation, and remained a part-time minister at a United Congregational Church, when Professor Sanders reminded his students on the first day not to forget to bring their "bible" to class, he was employing no chance analogy.

The Lecture Experience

The textbook's direct presence. In Sanders' course the textbook was a prominent and palpable presence in the classroom. He literally *touched* the book every class and enjoined the students to follow along. In addition to bringing it to class, he referred to it frequently throughout his lectures. Each lesson contained numerous direct quotations from the textbook that he would preface with the actual pages from which they were drawn. He would often introduce new portions of his lecture, with title headings and page numbers from the textbook (e.g. "Early Childhood on page 79 " [PD 135: 39]). In addition, he frequently navigated around the page itself (e.g. "Looking down at the bottom of the page, "the development of the self"! [PD 135: 001]). His indexical references to the actual concrete page were a staple of every class. The example below is typical, and shows that direct contact with the textbook that constitutes his lessons:

"… And on page 125, and you look at that *diagram* up there on the right hand corner, and, you know, can anybody here *not* figure out that those two, what two lines are of the same length? Hmm? Anybody have that much of a visual problem? But if you read the *text* … [PD 140: 005]

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[131] When I interviewed him, it was something that he was now doing only part-time. It should also be understood that his pastoral habitus was subtle. There were certainly no overt references to Christian theology, no efforts at proselytization or anything of the sort. There was however a clear and consistent espousal of social and political beliefs associated with Classic Liberalism, and a palpable disgust of how the 'The Tea Party's corrupting American politics -- a recurring theme in several lectures.

[132] A synthesis of "some sort of Quaker perception a la Mr. Parker Palmer" and Jewish theologian Martin Buber's concern for realizing an " I-thou relationship as opposed to I-it relationship" {PD 8: 006].

These direct references to Solomon Asch's famous 'parallel line experiment' in Chapter 5 in the textbook, were examined *together* in the classroom, with everyone following along in the book where the two lines were diagrammed. The actual paper-and-glue bound book was an inextricable part of this course.

As seen above, his most common method for referring to the textbook was through deixis. Specifically, he often used the adverbs *here* and *there* when referring to a textbook that was usually close at hand. For example, in summarizing George Herbert Meade`s theory of *the self* in chapter 3 he said, "And that's outlined *there*, I hope you get it down! It's a, it's a great approach, um, I think, in explaining, why we're here, and who we are." Occasionally he would collapse the research into the textbook using a plural pronoun. For example he would say, "they've got this *great* example *here*, one that has been used far and wide and in many contexts, and it comes out of a little town in Iowa, called Riceville Iowa." PD 139: 001. Nevertheless, the textbook was an intrinsic part of his lectures.

Sermonic lectures: anecdote, testimony and homelie. In hindsight, Sanders' lectures were as much sermons as they were lessons. In the face of student dissatisfaction, he seemed to soldier on, as if he assumed that his anecdotes had the power of parables[133]. Circling about the podium and quoting extensively from the textbook splayed atop he was a masterful story-teller. Every student that I interviewed commented on his story telling. Opinions ranged from those who thought his stories enhanced to those who thought they detracted. Mark, an 18-year old self-proclaimed conservative Christian who anticipated going into the military at the end of the year reflected on the class thus:

"At first I was just going with the class. I wanted to get it done with…Right from the

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[133] A symbol of Sander's willingness to soldier through discontent (in all its forms) I locate in a group of 3 students who seemed to talk almost incessantly in class, throughout much of the term. Sanders would on occasion tell them to "settle down", but most of the time he would simply talk over them. His voice was indeed powerful and the students' side conversation certainly could never overwhelm his, but their discussions were apparent to all. *Every person* that I interviewed in his class mentioned being distracted by this group of three students *and* that they wished he would be more forceful with them. However, when I interviewed the three students themselves, they did not mention their disruptiveness but suggested they were bored by Sander's class. In one of the very few classes I did not attend, apparently Sanders had finally "blown up" at the students. This made many of the students I interviewed quite happy. However this also underscores the possibility that my own presence likely modulated what he was prepared to demonstrate in the classroom.

beginning I thought he kind of told too many stories and it didn`t really go into the content.  But as it got towards the end I realized that the stories, they were nice.  They were cool because they kind of kept the class going. They made the class kind of enjoyable because he told stories and stuff and I don`t disagree with that. Because I had another, Professor Jones for Criminal Justice, he did that too, he told stories, and that`s how he made it good." PD 141 001-002.

This more positive attitude towards Sanders' stories however, appeared to represent a minority view.

Many of Sanders' stories were historical: some from his own personal biography; others from American History; on rare occasions he also drew from world history. One such instance was his argument that the Turkish atrocities against the Armenians after WWI were a case of genocide. Sanders remarked that although overlooked by the textbook "what the Turks did after World War one [to the Armenians] was really genocide". Some of the evidence for his argument was drawn from eye-witness accounts from Armenian survivors who were members of his congregation. Again he began his account stopping abruptly to remind the students that the story was not exactly his own, but another's, and drawn from his work as a full-time minister.

"They [the Turks] gathered, why I can talk about this is getting back to my old ministerial time, [my congregation] had a large Armenian population... and some were survivors of the genocide that took place". [PD 138: 001]

Sanders created a measure of suspense by starting slowly saying, 'They gathered'. He stopped mid-sentence to add a few historical details about the Armenian minority in Europe, and without missing a dramatic beat he continued:

"Anyway the Turks gathered together the Armenians, after the war, and m-a-r-c-h-e-d t-h-e-m in the summertime from the various villages. But before that took place, the genocide began. The male people, the fathers, the sons, the uncles, the grandfathers, they were gathered together in the village centers, and the Turkish troops *executed* them! And how did they do it? (he pauses for answers) They did it with? They did it with what's

called a *scimitar*. Anybody know what a scimitar is? A scimitar is a particular kind of sword (he proceeded to draw one on the board) like that (referring to he had just drawn) this is the blade (Pause). Lined them up, all right, in the center of the village, (pause) and then went down: Bum!, Bum!, Wham! [*each said loudly and followed by a pause*]. One after the other. Over three million probably, of the Armenians, who only had a population of about 6 million or so, were executed. That left the women and children". [PD 138: 003-007] [his emphasis]

Next from this vivid but distant account, he proceeded with a more on-the-ground perspective, of specific experiences conveyed to him as if by confession

"I heard stories of how the women would take their own urine and feces and *wipe* themselves with this, trying to discourage the rapes." [PD 138: 009][his emphasis].

As if conveying a series of testimonials, he continued with an account of an Armenian mother, a woman who had endured a murderous and forced march at the hands of the Turks.

"I remember one woman telling me about how she had her, she had two children at that point, very young children, walking along in the summer time in Turkey, it's very hot. Um. They were not given enough water or food, and she said she watched her children *burn* up in her eyes. Her children *died,* in her arms, for lack of, water. There are unfortunately other stories (pause) that this book doesn't tell -- Uh, sad, sad stories" [PD 138: 010 -012]. [his emphasis]

Indeed this last clause about omitted stories is tinged with irony. On the one hand, these stories are indeed tragic, and while it may be "sad" that they are not included in the textbook's narrative, their omission also provides Sanders with an opportunity to elaborate, and for engaging the students emotionally. He was completing his account when all of sudden he stopped abruptly; his voice cracking under the weight of his own emotions. He chuckled faintly as if surprised by his own momentary loss of emotional control. Instead of continuing he simply concluded with, "These stories, are just horrific (pause) horrific."

Most of his anecdotes were not so dramatic. Many were humorous and the vast majority were drawn from his life story. Indeed, his own life history and American History in general were the two most significant sources of course content outside the textbook. Within weeks of the first class we would all become familiar with his blue-collar youth and some of his formative teenage years working as a gravedigger. We would all learn that he was unhappily divorced, now happily remarried, that 15 years ago "diseases started popping up in his family" and that he had become the primary caretaker of a bed-ridden adult daughter was paralyzed with MS. To make matters all the more tragic, as the disease progressed, his daughter's husband had begun to physically abuse her before fleeing the country once she got pregnant.

This already lamentable tale took on Job-like proportions once we learned that his granddaughter was eventually diagnosed with Crohn's disease, and that Sanders has had to focus emotionally and financially on her care too. During one unforgettable class, he described how there was a bench warrant out for the husband's arrest and how if he ever returned to the country he would be escorted straight to prison. While listing some of the husband's shortcomings his voice abruptly raised to a scream, noting how *this* father was not even providing for "*his* kid!" – with "his kid" portion yelled suddenly and in vengeful anger. He paused a few additional moments to collect himself. The class was stunned. This was a loss of control they had never seen him display. Ultimately, this situation would became something he occasionally would joke about admitting that his household medical costs alone would keep him teaching at NECC for the rest of his life.

By the end of the course, twenty-year old Julie felt that Sander's had essentially "just wasted time" and that she had given up taking notes mid-way through the course. I asked if perhaps she had thought there was too much information in the course to follow. She became excited, if not incredulous at the thought:

> "Too much! He talked about his children! I could write his own biography for him. I know his life. Oh man! (in disbelief). I just feel like he. I feel like the way he approached the whole class kind of, was not right. I feel like he just walked in, 'what am I going to talk about today? Uh, I don't know. uh, 'There you go.' -then branch of into something random that makes no sense to anybody (pause) and then give test."

The Assessment Environment

Sanders approach to assessment was eclectic if not idiosyncratic. Although he too administered six tests at roughly equivalent intervals (just like Achebe) he employed several different formats for his tests. And while Sanders` syllabus also contained a prominent list of test-dates, by calling them "quizzes" and by varying their formats, their formality was downplayed.

Quiz Number	Quiz Format
1	Multiple-choice chapter test from text & Essay question from textbook
2	Short Answer
3	Short answer and Essay Questions
4	Multiple Choice & Short answer/Essay Questions
5	Multiple Choice &Short answer/ Essay Questions
6 – Final Exam	Multiple Choice & Short answer/ Essay Questions*

In addition, there was a homemade and informal quality to the presentation of the quizzes themselves. Instead of the conventional -- a question followed by a set of "lettered" or "numbered" answers stacked on top of one another, his multiple-choice answers were also numbered but presented one after the other in horizontal lines, as in regular prose text. Essentially, his answer possibilities were horizontally sequenced, not vertically stacked.

Multiple-choice quizzes also did not define the assessment experience in Sanders' class. Indeed, he did not rely on tests alone, but required a research paper of the students to be submitted at the end of the term. The students were simply asked to "apply a sociological lens to an issue." Sanders felt that the skills and habits practiced in writing the paper were the most important learning objectives; he urged that such a task "more importantly" develops students writing -- a skill to serve them well regardless of their future endeavors. A final explicit goal of

the research paper was to tap into the student's own "interests", to their own sense of relevance and engage them in the learning process.

In an effort to help the students select a topic he offered the following:

> "So this is what you do: Find an issue, a problem, a concern, an institution, an idea, a place a system in chapters 3 through 16 that *interests* you. Next reduce and define it to a question or topic that fits the size and limits of your paper"

Thus, it was important to Sanders that he granted a measure of autonomy to the students in his course, at least at the level of their assessment. Indeed, he joked to me in private about one student's paper whose enthusiasm for the growth and benefits of marijuana was far too elaborate and impassioned to have simply been an intellectual exercise. In addition, for the final exam, students were given 24 multiple-choice questions, and told that they were responsible for only 20 of them. They could answer as many questions as they wanted and would not be penalized for incorrect answers (essentially giving them a risk free opportunity to obtain 4 questions worth of "bonus" points). In addition, the final exam contained an *optional* second part made up of an essay question that asked students to synthesize the semester's content and apply it to a current news story he described (See Below). His preparedness to be flexible in the assessment of his students and to create tasks that might motivate them was evident from the first day, when we told them he would give extra marks at the end of the term if they completed the three-day media-free exercise and journaled their account of their experience.

While he personally constructed about half of all quiz questions, the remainder were drawn from materials provided in the textbook supplement. Sanders had designed all short answer and essay questions (except for the essay question in the first quiz which came from the textbook). His short answer questions were largely definitional in nature, yet also constructed so that the students might strive to articulate a personal relevance for a term. For example, for his second quiz, Sanders not only asked the students for a definition of "culture" but for them to discuss "how the concept applied to their own lives".

There was also an idiosyncratic aspect to many of his questions. For example, questions relating to historical details discussed in lecture might have seemed odd to novice sociology students. For example, one of the questions from Quiz 2 read as follows:

"'Sophie Tucker, a red-hot mama or flapper in the early decades of the 20thCe said, "From birth to age 18, a girl needs good parents; from 18 to 35 she needs good looks, from 35 to 55 she needs a good personality; from 55 on she needs cash.' "Using the common themes in the ideas of Freud, Piaget, Kohlberg, Mead, and Erikson, I interpret Ms. Tucker`s statement. How accurate was she?"

Quoting a historical personage and asking students to comment on its sociological accuracy in light of other theorists from history is certainly an interesting if not a unique proposition; however, the willingness to relate historical evidence to sociological generalizations, in the case of novice sociologists (and students), might have required further explanation.

His quiz number three took an even greater creative twist. One week prior to the quiz he told the students to choose a `group` that they were either a member of, or one that they could observe. They were told to conduct an observational analysis of that group. For their upcoming quiz they would be asked to describe their experiences in light of some of the concepts described in chapter Five on Groups and Organizations (e.g. leadership styles, bureaucracy, groupthink, in and out groups, level of diversity etc.). The students were also told that they were free to choose whatever concepts from the chapter they deemed relevant to their observations.

Finally in a similar show of flexibility, the bonus essay question offered during their Final, was provided to them only after they turned in their exam. The question said,

"A discussion broadcast on public radio, 12/7/10 contained three sociologists. They were discussing contemporary African American family life. One said, that if Americans wished to see what the American family will become in the 21st century, they need only to look at what is happening among African Americans today. The other sociologists agreed."

The students were to comment upon this claim in the form of an essay. Students were also permitted to use their textbooks for this question. The students had been forewarned that there would be such a question on the final, and that a well-organized and in-depth answer could add as many as *10 points to their final average* adding, "you cannot lose points if you answer the

question." Thus, not only was there an effort to create questions that might engage students, but a willingness to exchange grades for their efforts.

The Textbook and the Historical Limitations of Sociologists

Beyond, quiz questions, Professor Sander's classroom lectures were overwhelmingly built upon a set of quotations recited verbatim from the textbook, and a set of complementary historical examples or personal anecdotes meant to instantiate and/or to illuminate them. In addition, a subtle, but ever present strand through the course was his running commentary about the textbook. His comments were of two types: <u>praise</u> for how interesting the content could be (e.g. "chapter five is a very interesting chapter") and <u>misgivings</u> about how the textbook handles History. Regardless of the historical examples the does provided (like the case of the Armenian genocide above) Sanders often lamented the absence of the "other stories". [PD 137 :012]

Occasionally he would quote sarcastically when historical details were described the textbook, hemming and hawing or clenching his jaws as if to suggest the textbook representations were only half true. Other times he told the students explicitly about his vexations with how History was handled by their textbook. From the chapter on race he said,

> "Again, you know, I wish sociologists would get their history down a *little* better, but anyway. It says, `looking back in time WASP immigrants were highly skilled and motivated to achieve by what we now call the protestant work ethic.` Wellllll (exaggerating the word to state his ambivalence) , that`s, a *huge* exaggeration. When those pilgrims, that we are going to remember, arrived on Thanksgiving day, they didn`t have the foggiest idea what they were doing". [his emphasis] [PD: 137 039-040]

He went on to describe how The Pilgrims did not even know how to be farmers, much less know anything about growing something like corn. In point of fact Sanders claimed, had "Squantum" not greeted The Pilgrims upon their arrival and helped them with agriculture, they would certainly have "died out". [PD: 137 044]

Sanders' "Stories"

In the absence of explaining his reasons for using historical peoples and events, Sanders' examples were likely perceived as tangential to the course, and not as valid cultural material for sociological analysis, perhaps even undermining his connection to the discipline sociology itself. By midterm, many students were struggling to separate a positive impression of him as person, from a decidedly more negative impression of his instruction and of what they were learning. Different students struck this balance with varying degrees of success. Max, a 24 year-old Marine squad leader 8 months from shipping off to Afghanistan was always one to be respectful. He described the structure of the class thus:

> "So it will be 45 minutes of just *stories*, and you know, his background; and 20 minutes
> of me taking some notes … 20 minutes of actual stuff from the book. But I guess it's
> pretty much interesting, how he can pretty much relate everything in the book to his life"
> PD151 17 [my italics].

Max was actually not being sarcastic when he mentioned the part about Sanders being able to relate the class to his life. However, a few seconds later he recognized the potential humor in what he said, and chuckled.

A problematic presentation of Sociology. Thirty-year-old Estelle was much less charitable about her impression of his stories and the course. She was the mother of a six-year old son and had first attended NECC some ten years ago. By the time I met her she was in her 3rd consecutive semester at NECC. Her goal was to finish up the term then transfer to a Math Education department at a nearby regional 4-year university and eventually become a high school math teacher. For Estelle,

> "I think he is a very nice guy, who really enjoys the sound of his own voice. And I think
> that it's uncomfortable. *I don't always agree with my teachers but he says things that are
> just blatantly untrue.* So I have a hard time trusting anything that he says". PD 143: 007
> [my italics]

Estelle was one of only a handful of students I interviewed who actually made efforts to read the

textbook, to read it for the sake of learning the material and not just for the sake of her exams or grades.[134] In my interview with her she recalled having read several topics in the textbook, yet on account of the examples Sanders had used to illustrate them, she left the lesson decidedly more perplexed than when she had entered.

> "I actually have understood the material and then he tells a story and I leave there going, did I, do I understand the material? Maybe I don't because I don't think it makes sense from what he said in the story ... "

Indeed she claimed to have discussed the issue with her older sister who had graduated from a 4-year college with a degree in Sociology, and between the two of them they could not understand the relevance of his example.

> "I think he was talking about the first test and he was telling this story about how when he was a priest that there were these two men who committed suicide, and he was trying to compare it to, now I can't remember the term, but something that we were going to take our test on. And I remember asking my sister, going you know, 'I've read this in the book. This is the story, the examples that he gave us, *and I don't get it!'* And she was like, 'I have, I don't even know like how that relates'. And I think maybe it did, in a very like [indirect way]. … I'm confused on this.   And this is the topic or the story he gave to help us understand, and it made me even more confused. I mean after that, that's when I was kind of like, 'maybe this guy really doesn't know what he is talking about or, cant explain it to us well, *maybe* is the better way to say it[135]"

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[134] As an aside, I should say that the group of textbook readers is broken down even further into those who can extract deep meanings from the text, and those who would seem to require more guidance. Estelle (like Betsy) in the previous case, seemed to fit into the former category.

[135] This is a distinction that she drew upon in discussing her own field of math education in which it is one thing to know the math and quite another to be able to teach it. Although she has always loved math and does well in math classes, she does find it odd that one spends so much time learning math concepts they will never have to teach.

In addition to suggesting that there might be a problem with the sociological content he presented, Estelle also confessed to being irritated and impatient with a self-promotional strand that she perceived in his stories.

"Some of his stories, they just seem really geared to like look what I've done. Look at the change I've made. I think it was me calling the security that made this kid get arrested and changed the fraternities across the, you know what I mean? [24]

Still she wanted it to be understood that she had nothing against a story driven pedagogy, but Sanders's stories seemed (among other things) just too far afield:

"I don't mind hearing stories and anecdotes from a professor, if it ties into the material at all, but it should be short, I mean it shouldn't; he goes off on tangents that just go completely away from the subject that we're learning (she ends with an inquisitive tone as if to say, am I wrong)" PD 143: 28

Returning to Julie, who like Estelle, had now been at NECC for three consecutive semesters – and though she was earning between an A and B in the course, she too was struggling. She too felt that while Sander's heart may have been in the right place she could not help that his teaching was not.

"It's not, *not* interesting. It *is* interesting, but um. I think it's based on the teacher. I think he, he talks a lot! And a lot of it is not even about the course itself. And what he says is still kind of, semi-interesting (she giggles), but uh. … Cuz then he'll give you a quiz, and then he's like, 'All right, you need to know this stuff'. And kind of along the way he doesn't tell you much of anything, and then just plops something down in front of you. And you're like 'oh, huh, OK' (acting surprised)". PD 171; 32-34

And so while Estelle thought that Sanders would wander off on "tangents", Julie experienced the whole class as a giant exercise in randomness, as if there was no central topic to even wander from!

"He'll start to make a point and then he'll just, *whiffff*, then go away, 'off-topic', and then start talking about that. And then the next thing you know, 'now where does that connect with what you were just talking about?' PD: 171; 040

The randomness that Julie sensed was likely only exacerbated by the idiosyncrasy of his testing (mentioned above). This experience of randomness affected her ability to get much out of the course.

" … And I feel like he kind of just wasted time, almost. Because I feel like at the end of the day, you were, I was not taking notes. I just sat there the whole class, and stared at the wall.

"… at least in History he would be talking about something." Julie's experience of randomness in Sanders sociology class was a stark contrast to her experience of the history course she took with him the previous semester! It was her positive experiences in the History class that convinced her to enroll in his Sociology course in the first place. However, whereas the history class seemed purposeful and coherent, the sociology course by contrast seemed more an exercise in futility. While in history, it was *possible* to lose your concentration in lecture, and to lose the thread of the narrative -- in sociology she felt as if there was simply no narrative to lose sight of in the first place.

"Because, if you zone out [in the History class], which is easy to do, if you zone out, and you don't pay attention, it's, it's… You get lost! Because when he then goes the next time to talk about things, you think he is going to talk about the next chapter, but really he starts from the end of the one before, or wherever he left off" 031-035.

Julie described how in Sander's History class (as opposed to his sociology class) one had to focus on the web of meanings that was being spun so as not to become hopelessly lost.

"At least in History, he would be talking about something, that had to do with something

else, that had to do with something else, that had to do with something else, if you're not paying attention you're going to lose it, and you're not going to understand that way".

Unlike the sociology class, she took copious notes in history. She also suggested that the notes she took in the History class were relevant to the tests. As for Sociology, she had largely given up on taking notes along with hoping to perceive any relevance in his lectures.

" … And I feel like he kind of just wasted time, almost. Because I feel like at the end of the day, you were, I was not taking notes. I just sat there the whole class, and stared at the wall.

Me: But in the History class you felt like you had to?

Julie: Well right, because he was going over really specific information …

Limited opportunities for discussion. While Max was of the sort to believe that there was little he could learn from his non-expert (and often younger) peers, a majority of the other students I interviewed seemed to feel as if the preponderance of Sander's own stories was related to an unfortunate lack of discussion in class. Julie for example was particularly frustrated as she saw the class as rife with conversation opportunities:

"There were a few areas that were kind of controversial ... I feel like, you could have had, like there were a few discussions that kind of bubbled up, but there could have been *so* many more if he had given us more information, and more, like *leadership* [he emphasis] 82-84

Estelle thought that in subjects such as Sociology, opportunities for discussion should be made.

He doesn't teach so that there is much class discussion. And I really think that that is probably one of the best ways to teach in my opinion, especially a subject like this." PD 143: 11

Putting Historical Questions to the Class.

And while questions to the class might technically have represented opportunities for discussion, they did not appear to be experienced as such by most students. *Listening* appeared to be a cardinal responsibility in Sanders' class -- akin to *copying* in Achebe's. And though Sanders did ask questions in his lectures, many of the questions appeared rhetorical, with little expectation that answers would lead to conversation; they seemed rather more like off-the-cuff quizzes on historical trivia. Questions seemed to punctuate the lectures with flashes of active engagement, as students would be asked to articulate a verbal response. Yet the questions were often of a yes-no variety and it was usually related historical content or personal anecdotes that were source of his in-class questions. Textbook content itself was rarely (if ever) a source of questions while the historical examples used to illustrate it, almost always were.

Essentially after asking a question, Sanders would soon be able to elaborate. For example, during his discussion of the Armenian Genocide, he asked if anyone knew what a "scimitar" was? Or, in his lecture on socialization, he abruptly departed from the textbook and asked if anyone knew who Bartleet Gimatti was? He explained that he was a former president of Yale University who had resigned his position. Then Sanders asked if they know why he would do that:

" [He] gave it up to become, to become what?   Anybody remember? Anybody know anything about Bartlett Giamatti? He`s now dead, but not that long ago, he gave that up to *become?* (dramatic pause)—The commissioner of baseball!"

Finally, not all his questions were impossible for the average student to answer. Some questions of historical trivia actually were 'gettable'. For example, in his lecture on religion when he asked if anyone knew "the date for the first European Settlement in the America", several students offered answers. A minority of the questions he asked called for students to recall details from their own personal pasts. In the lecture on Deviance, for example, he asked the students, "When was the first time you tried a cigarette?" That his efforts to engage the students seemed to have been easily discounted by them (or at least not easily recalled) may have been related to a perception that his questions were more rhetorical devices than pedagogical

ones, efforts perhaps to re-energize listeners then opportunities for them to create new meanings. Finally, the religious frame implicit in his lectures, his questions may have had as much in common with the call and response techniques of gospel music, as learning activities within lectures.

Easy tests and barely relevant textbooks. In addition to the centrality of Sanders personal stories, the other thing everyone agreed on was the fact that the course was easy. Julie, might have been even more upset about her experience were it not for the fact that she received acceptable grades. Yet in her estimation the course was above all designed to deliver high grades.

> " … he kind of just outlines everything for you to begin with. He doesn't really talk about much in class, but then he will tell you exactly what's on the test; cuz he wants you to do well. ... And then he tells you at the beginning of the semester that there is going to be a paper due and then drops little hints in the middle, and you're good to go, if you do it. Even if you do it like a week before, you are fine. I did it in like three days. Not even. 016-019 021

As for the test themselves and class participation, Julie was no more sanguine:

> "Circle answers and then just write. And that's what all his tests were like, and they really were not that difficult. So once you figure out that the tests aren't difficult. You don't hand in any homework. To him, you don't really particip, class participation, I mean you can raise your hand and say something once in a while, but I mean, pause, there's no real reason to.

Finally if Juile's experience in lecture was often one of randomness, in the end her sense for the content was one of insignificance

> "…[B]asically reading the book wasn't important, and going to class wasn't even that important, except to hear what was going to be on the test, 51

Even Max, who was certainly one of the more appreciative students I had interviewed, thought the course could have been made a little harder. However, Max did not necessarily see the problem as being entirely Sander's fault, but rather something endemic to community college.

> "His, I mean, I mean none of the classes that I really take have been all that challenging, to be honest with you. But you know at the same time, whereas his, you know, stories and stuff would get to be too much sometimes, you know, and everything with his life experience. He's still an intelligent man that made things like, you know, easy to follow, you know. He might have been a little too easy, you know on us, and stuff. The way things are graded, blah, blah, blah, and what was expected of you."

Neither Max nor Julie had much call for the book once they recognized that it was not critical to doing well

Summarizing student perceptions

All three students (Max, Julie and Estelle) were doing well in the class with B plus through A minus averages. Yet only Estelle was reading the textbook, even after it was understood to be unnecessary for the grade. And only Max claimed to have been "satisfied" with his course experience, that is, "more satisfied" with this one "than with any other classes" he was taking that semester.

Yet Estelle and Julie were decidedly unsatisfied with their experience in Sander's class. However, Estelle had a son and a plan. She was finishing her associates, getting a Bachelors and going on to become a math teacher. Also, she would *not* be the first in in her family to get a 4-year degree. Julie was 10 years Estelle's junior and would have been the first in her family to go to college. She had no plans that could not be changed at the drop of a hat. When I first met her she had been considering a career in Art Therapy; the next time I interviewed her she was thinking about Social Work; the following term she was agonizing just over how many college courses remain to be taken. Julie's dissatisfaction with the class bordered on anger, but her anger was less the self-righteous anger of someone not getting what they had paid for, but the panic-stricken anger of a lost person looking for help.

Regarding the content, Julie felt at sea in Sanders class, with just too many things appearing to be random, and no clear image of the discipline itself ever emerging[136]. She stipulated that if she did have a question, one that was truly burning inside, she certainly would have asked!   Yet she felt that asking a question in this class would be to take her confusions seriously, and that this would open up a whole can of worms. She imagined how one question would lead to another, then another and to another, and because Sanders had fundamentally deviated from the textbook anyway, she saw very little point.

> "I guess sometimes I felt if I were really paying attention at what he is talking about … and I feel like he is missing a point or something, I feel like if I were to raise my hand and ask a question about where he is getting that from, or whatever the question is, I feel like I would have so many other questions. Because if I actually read that chapter, and listened to what he was saying, nothing would really make sense, because he wouldn't even be talking about the chapter… It would end, "blehehehehhh" (sound of vomit) it would be like a projectile question at him " 045-049

 When I interviewed Julie again at the beginning of her 4th semester at NECC, with her Sociology experience receding further in memory, the balance between positive and negative learning experiences seemed to be shifting. Her capacity for "getting it over with" seemed to be waning. When I first met her she was certain she would graduate! She said as much, unequivocally and unreservedly.[137]   After Principles of Sociology (and the other classes that term) transfer was no longer at the forefront of her awareness and in its place a sense that persistence itself was taking its toll on her. I asked her about her about the new term:

> "Me: Tell me a little bit more about how you are feeling about school this term as compared to last term.

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[136] She mentioned in our final interview how she had in point of fact taken Sociology in High School, and though she did not feel that her High School class had given her a sense for what the discipline was, she felt that her experience in Sanders class had not improved her comprehension. She still felt like she did not have a good idea of what Sociology is.

[137] Also, contrary to our earlier interviews, "interesting" as being art therapist may have sounded in the abstract, it ultimately did not quite seem exciting enough. Recently she had discovered that doing Community service was exciting and has since decided to begin exploring careers in Social Work.

Jamie: Oh man, I-JUST-DONT-WANT-TO-DO –IT!

Me: But you've done it for so long. This is term number four!

Jamie: Right! -(pause) uhhhhhh –(mock scream). Cuz, I figured by now I'd be on my way out, but instead, it's like I got to be stuck here for another semester, taking MORE classes that I really don't care about! Yes! I am not psyched! I just want to bbbbbust right through it!"

It should be noted that Julie's apparent change in attitude towards persisting --from a foregone conclusion to herculean task, I take as symbolic experiences beyond just her own, and will figure prominently in this dissertation.

CASE THREE

Logan's *Approach to Teaching* Introductory Sociology at NECC

The Lecture Experience

Unlike the cases of Achebe or Sanders, Professor Logan's use of numerous instructional resources and processes made it patently unwise (if not impossible) to posit an invariant structure within her class. Yet one inescapable and determining context for the class was the fact that it occurred at 8:00 in the morning! Some students sipped from Dunkin Donut coffee cups, others wandered in disheveled, late, coffee cups in hand. Others simply nodded off in class. Many appeared simply to be waiting to awaken completely. Alberta, a 24-year old African-American woman who had spent a year at one of the state universities but was now here to become a social worker remarked that,

"Sometimes the class doesn't participate as much, which makes it a little harder, and the class go by longer… sometimes it can be boring … It's 8 o'clock in the morning, you know." PD 149

Indeed. Logan's voice tended towards the monotone and her delivery entailed frequent pauses. Even 20 year-old Amanda who had dropped out of an ivy-league school, and was transferring next year to a state school, who 'loved' Logan, loved the content, still had misgivings about how she presented the material in class.

> "Sometimes I feel so bad because she'll try to get us involved and ask these different questions and everyone just like gives her that blank stare ... (giggles) Do you not see the time? [as if pleading with Logan not to ask her questions so and make everyone feel so awkward]. PD 173 020

In spite of the blank stares, Logan would persist; the silence would swell until finally a student would relent and offer a response. Sometimes Professor Logan herself seemed uncomfortable with the silences she had created. Occasionally she would try to rescue these silences, jumping into the vacuum with additional questions if not answers of her own.

Nonetheless, interrogative sentences made up a conspicuously large proportion of her statements in all her classes. In addition, her questions were neither circumscribed by design (e.g. Achebe), nor circumscribed rhetorically (e.g. Sanders). Rarely did anyone speak before being acknowledged and when they spoke it was either with tentative answers or with their own hesitant questions. Indeed, interactions in Logan's class were much *less* confrontational than in the other two

Some of her questions required reflection; many were of the fill in blank variety. Most of the student responses when they occurred were rephrased, yet many of her questions were simply unanswered and followed by awkward silences. That said, her use of many different instructional processes and resources, and her capacity to talk to the students as if motivated by sociology and not by a desire to reproduce the sociological textbook, set her apart from the others. Numerous activities and experiences constituted her classes (e.g. lectures, group work, brainstorming on the blackboard, movies, in-class writing etc.). And unlike her colleagues, there was never a single class that only had her lecturing from the podium.

And though many of Logan's students seemed ambivalent about the course and found her lecture style boring, many of those same students were also powerfully moved by at least one of

the different elements of her course (e.g. the movie, the in-class article, the documentary etc.). Some of these students still admitted that the subject was interesting, if only her presentation could have been more dynamic.

It should be said that Amanda's enthusiasm for the course was so effusive and positive (and for whom the course was perfect) was atypical for any of the students I encountered in any of the classes. Amanda was indeed the classic bright student who was unreservedly grateful for having a whole new world of exciting ideas introduced to her. The class for her was not just entertaining, it was moving. Indeed Amanda saw herself as possibly pursuing graduate work in Sociology.

Not all positive attitudes towards the course (much less most) reflected such watershed moments in a student's life. Susan, a first-term, full-time student, with straight A's in high school who was applying to Boston University next year, also liked the class. Her positive impression of the course relied less on the instructor and how she ran the course, than her fascination with content. When I asked her what she liked about the class she said,

> "Just the whole basic, you know; just the *idea* of it to be honest. It's thought provoking. I didn't think of how much society affected a person. You know, I like to think of myself as an individual. And then to realize, hey well
> you know, my friends liked all this, and then I started liking it. Like kind of shapes; you know what I mean? So it's very interesting, kind of makes you think about yourself too. I guess like that kind of thinking (she giggles)"

However, even Amanda recognized that her enthusiasm and that few of her colleagues might not be everyone's experience of the course. And she too laments the lack of conversation in the class, suggesting that this has implications for everyone's experience. Amanda noted,

> ".. I don't know. I think that because it's a morning class people aren't really attentive and it kind of uh, stinks because me and a couple of other people will talk here and there. And you don't really get a group conversation or, uh, you know, back and forth communication, because pretty much, it's just all her cuz everyone, you know, is still half asleep". PD 173 09-010

None of the students I interviewed in this class talked about how irrelevant the textbook was to doing well in the course, whereas a *majority* of students in the other two classes did! And while Susan admitted that Logan's "lectures can put us to sleep", and that the content itself could be "very confusing at some points", it remained "really interesting." Susan also enjoyed reading the textbook, she liked it "a lot"; she would read whole chapters in a single setting. She saw the textbook as a way to help her understand things she could not quite comprehend from Logan's presentation alone. Nonetheless, the fact that the material could be so confusing, and require such efforts to comprehend, according to Susan is "… why I like it so much.'

Assessing, and the Assessment Environment

The textbook was the backbone of the course. It structured the learning experiences and was the source of midterm and final examination questions. Logan did not however lecture from the textbook. Indeed she employed numerous modalities to create learning environments for her students. In addition to the paired interviews from the first day, there were in-class reading assignments, three movies, and three group exercises and in class writing assignments. And though her class was predominantly a lecture course, it was not *essentially or exclusively* a lecture course. There were also multiple modes of assessment. While a multiple choice midterm and final together accounted for 55 % of the overall grade, a full 45% of the grade came from essay assignments

Like her ambivalence about using an encyclopedic textbook, she was the only one of the three instructors to express some ambivalence for using multiple-choice. And though she said that her "heart" wasn't truly into such assessments, she was nonetheless surprised at the variation in results among her students. The virtue of the tests she believed was that it kept the students "honest" in their reading of the textbook. That said, she also assigned two "research papers", each one was to include references in addition to the textbook.

The first was due by the third week of class, was a 2-3 page assignment where the students were expected to identify a *norm*, then design a research project to study the effects of breaking it. The second "research paper", this time 3-4 pages in length, asked the students to describe a social institution from a functionalist perspective, comparing its functioning under

conditions when the economic institution is operating properly and when it is not operating. This assignment constituted 30% of the overall grade.

The remaining 15% of the overall grade (and remaining written assessments) were from in-class film commentaries. Professor Logan assigned 3, what she called "1-minute" film commentaries, on days when movies were screened. It was also worth noting that she stipulated on the syllabus that questions on the films would also appear on the exams. In particular she screened one Hollywood movie (i.e. One flew over the Cukoo`s Nest) in conjunction with the unit/chapter on "Deviance" along with two historicizing documentaries associated with the "Gender Stratification" and "Race and Ethnicity" chapters respectively.

Finally, while she too employed multiple-choice exams, hers stood out for being *cumulative*. They were actually reviews of material that had already been covered in class, and not simply larger tests test covering the most recent material from class (i.e Achebe's tests).

The lesson structure

Embedded in Logan's lectures was the notion that the stuff of sociology was interpretations and social constructions, that sociological knowledge could be constructed *jointly* by her and the students together. A frequent technique she employed in class (one never employed by the others) was to prompt the students with questions, and in a burst of brainstorming would write the relevant responses on the blackboard. After further discussion and lecture the class would return to the blackboard and synthesize a set of sociological claims from what was written.

A conspicuous dimension that set her apart from the others was her concern to make sure that responses (at least) were phrased *appropriately*. She repeated virtually all responses; most of the repeated answers were rephrased, some more than others; sometimes contextual words were added; sometimes vernacular lexical items were exchanged for more sociological ones, occasionally the entire claim was transposed into a more academic syntax. There was a wide range of ways in which student answers were re-worked -- from simply repeated, to complexly re-worded. I suggest that these efforts reflected Logan's efforts to familiarize the students with an oral variant of a sociological or *academic register* (Schlepegrell, 2004).

In a partial illustration of this point I quote from one of her lessons at length. It exemplified a back and forth interaction that typified her classes. The interaction was centered on

understanding the definitions for the concepts ascribed and *achieved statuses.*[138] Where Logan conspicuously departed form her colleagues is that she endeavored to weave the students one-word or clause–sized answers into larger patches of an academic register. In the exchange below we see Logan not only trying to tease examples from her students, but also re-framing a difficult answer [002-007].   This sort of piecemeal construction of a dialogue interspersed with sociological claims was a fundamental element of Logan's lessons.[139]

001   Logan: You marry into a family, one might say that`s an achieved status. It`s not necessarily your place of birth. But Prince Charles of England, that position is ascribed. You are born into it (pause). Other examples? (Pause).

002   Student: Your social class?

003   Logan: What do you think? Social Class, Achieved? Or Ascribed?

004   Student: I would say achieved.

005   Logan: Achieved (repeated matter-of-factly, not enthusiastically as if correct). You point out that perhaps our definition is not, uh, precise enough. If you are literally born into a family, you are born into a certain class position. *Alright?* But that class position in our society, do we say that your position in society is fixed from birth to death?

006   Several Students: No

007   Logan: No. Is it the case that for many people, for most of us ? (no time allowed for response). It is. For many of us we have some mobility. We move out of, we move around, up and down, around, within our social class. *Alright ?* So I`m really glad you

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[138] "An **ascribed status** is a social position that a person receives at birth or takes on involuntarily later in life…By contrast an **achieved status** refers to a social position a person takes on voluntarily that reflects personal ability and effort [bold in original] (Macionis, 2009. P.99)

[139] Similarly, just as she was able to close the first day class with several questions, on days that were devoted to movies the screening was either prefaced or concluded with questions.

brought that up because that uh, speaks to, the fact that this definition is not precise, its not complete. You`re born into a social family with a certain social class position, but that social class position is something that we would say is the result of, effort. A result of many different things, *alright ?* many different choices, opportunities, um, that your parents did or did not have, or did or did not avail themselves to. So I think I would say that social class, well social class IS an achieved status. *Alright ?* To the extent that you are born into a family, with a certain social class, how did they get that position? They achieved it. Have I totally confused you? or (pause). We will certainly be revisiting that. Other aspects of what are other characteristics of people that have social meaning that often are ways that we use to organize, if not ourselves, that you are born into?

008   Student: Ethnicity?

009   Ethnicity? What do you think?

010   Student: Ascribed?

011   Logan: Ascribed? *She writes `Ethnicity` on the board.* Tell me about ethnicity. What does ethnicity refer to? (long pause)

012   Student--Your background?

013   Logan-: Your background, your cultural background (long pause). I think we have a little bit of wiggle room (pause). We`ll convert to different religions and adopt a lot of the, uh social practices, customs, traditions associated with that. Might we say they have reshaped their ethnicity? Possibly （*Logan did not await for a response)* (long pause) *Alright.* Give me a more, give me a hard one? *a bit of nervous laughter at recognizing she might be boasting or taunting.*

014 Student: Race ?

015   Logan-- Race? Did someone say race? Ok, good, Race! *Writing `race` on the board.* The color of your skin.

016   Student: Gender?

017   Logan: Gender. *writing `gender` on board* (long pause).

018   Student: Is, is your age?

019   Logan: Uh, Age? Um. This is sort of biologically determined. Right? You don`t really have control over your age. So I would say, yes. And we tend to organize society, or social institutions, by age. We segregate age groups in various ways. We uh, provide opportunities and kinds of recognition based on age in many ways. The expectations, Yeah -- *Calling on a raised hand.*

020   Student: What about like, I don`t know how to phrase it, but you`re born, like, until you become, like, like I was born, like, a daughter to like my parents. Like I was born a cousin. I was born a niece. But then I voluntarily achieved to become like, a mother or a parent. It could be something like, would that be an ascribed title?

021   Logan: Ok. Good question. Alright. What do you think?

There are many pedagogical elements worthy of note here. Not the least of which is the way that Logan takes an incorrect answer (from the textbook's standpoint), contradicts it with the *correct* one, yet also shows a limitation of textbook definitions themselves. Her continuous efforts to weave student answers and lives into her lecture along with her routine checking for student comprehension suggest an interest in decidedly more than just being able to reproduce portions of the textbook.

At the very least she appears to have done a *deep* (Chapter One) reading of the textbook. And thus is able to hold (and convey) a relativistic sense for its concepts meanings rather than a more absolutist or black-and-white one. However, at present I simply want to underscore

Logan's *use* of the textbook. Although the textbook was implied in her lessons she neither referenced (e.g. Sander's quotations), nor mirrored (e.g. Achebe's slides) it. Instead it was a source of definitions and concepts from which lectures were spun or inspired -- themselves efforts to make students talk (perhaps converse). The students above were asked to generalize from definitions, to provide their own examples -- those examples in turn were methodically critiqued and re-framed so that they could come to a fuller and more personal comprehension. That said, it will be to the relatively *surface* level reading and use of the textbooks by the other two NECC sociology instructors, with their overriding efforts to reproduce the textbook, that will concern us in the next Chapter.

Insufficient Dialogue

Nonetheless, in spite of Logan's conspicuous efforts, a large proportion of students in all three classes perceived there to have been insufficient dialogue in the course. In spite of her questions, and her efforts to generate conversation the students I interviewed noted a palpable absence of dialogue in the course. Susan stipulated that the weakest point of the whole experience was the fact that, "in our class nobody talks to each other." A fact she admitted may be related to the fact that everyone's backgrounds were so different. For her part Amanda confessed,

> "I'm quiet in class, cuz everyone else is quiet. There's not really much talking done
> because it is so early in the day… if there was more engagement, more people speaking, I
> think the class would be a lot better. Just hearing examples and getting into conversation
> about one thing helps you learn. But since there is really no one talking in class. *It's all
> her."* {my emphasis)

While there was a surprising consensus among the students that Principles of Sociology at NECC lacked sufficient dialogue, it was equally apparent that although dialogue was *not* designed to be an integral part of Achebe or Sanders courses, it was apparent that Logan's class was supposed to be dialogical in nature. The following sections summarize the instructors approaches -- suggesting all the while that the presence and absence of *intentional dialogue* in

the classroom is related to how instructors approached the textbook is in the classroom. However, in the remainder of this chapter, I focus on the signs of a reproductionist approach to teaching from textbook. In the next chapter I offer a concrete description and analysis of a reproductionist approach to textbook teaching.

ANALYSIS

Achebe's Approach

Achebe's approach to teaching this introductory sociology class was among many things, a model of clarity. From the very first day, students understood that testing and exams were paramount, and that getting the best grade possible at the end of the term, was the best possible outcome. Exactly 85% of their grade was going to be determined by how well they answered a total 375 multiple-choice questions in 450 minutes, distributed across 6 tests over the course 13 weeks of lectures. At the level of content layout and emphasis, this was the most salient information on the syllabus (other than textbook chapter numbers to be covered each week).

After the first test, students knew that above all they needed the *notes* to do well. Many students, though not all (i.e. Ayshe) knew that if they obtained the notes and reviewed them, they would do well on the tests. Indeed, making sure the students had opportunities to receive the notes was one of Achebe's most important teaching goals (See Chapter 4). As for the textbook, *all* of the students I interviewed agreed that it was irrelevant to the course. Raven had even sold her textbook back to the college but a few weeks into the class -- right after the first exam. Again, it cannot be underscored enough how reading the textbook would likely have taken a very motivated student, especially after it became clear that doing well did *not* require doing so. Moreover, such an outcome was all the more likely, when the only value made explicit was the inherent value higher exam results.

Several students found the exams anxiety provoking. With a little over a minute per question, some students had just enough time to read, remember and circle. While Ayshe, felt she did not even have enough time for that, Betsy found the exam thoroughly unchallenging along any dimension. Still, many of the students I interviewed were positively disposed towards Achebe and his course. And while Aaron and others (noted above) found the course quite funny, I continued to harbor a sense that this banter like interaction was substituting for content based

learning.

Nevertheless, one of the most common themes expressed by the students was that *Professor Achebe had given them everything they needed, to do well in the course. If they did poorly it was their own fault.* They certainly could not claim not to have known what was expected of them.[140] Indeed Aaron was even prepared to place the absence of conversation on his fellow students' shoulders rather than place it at the feet of professor Achebe.

Sander's Approach

Sanders' approach to teaching sociology, in spite of its many virtues (e.g. multiple methods of assessment, efforts to minimize testing anxiety, an overall caring orientation towards students), was ultimately confused, and left many students disappointed. He had suggested that students should have high expectations for the course but left many feeling cheated. Students were initially led to believe that they would be made into a "community" and that together they would succeed in the class. However, as the course became more of a monologue than a conversation, departing ever further from some of his conceptions of teaching (Chapter 4), and from what he appeared to have promised the first day (Chapter 5) some students became increasingly frustrated over time (e.g. Julie). In a course he *promised* would not be a lecture class, by the end of the course those few attempts at group discussions at the beginning of the term had become distant memories. And like Achebe's course, barring a few spontaneous eruptions of discussion, lecture was *the* instructional process employed in the course.

Just about everyone I interviewed thought that the class was easy! Not only did Sanders tell students exactly what would be on the tests, but as for grading, he appeared to give you marks 'just for just breathing' (Field journal entry: conversation with Julie, 12.15.11). Students appeared to differ only in how important having an easy class was to them. Many seemed to appreciate having a class that did not make them overly anxious, that would allow them to focus on their more demanding courses (e.g. Estelle). Some just enjoyed being able to sit back and listen to the bard (e.g. Max). Others were angry and felt the course to have been essentially a wasted opportunity to learn something new (e.g. Julie).

Perhaps, because he was not a sociologist, or, because he did not have much experience

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[140] It should be said that this reflects Achebe's own perspective on the significance of grades to the overall course experience.

in the social sciences, Sanders would often fall back on two modes with which he did have substantial familiarity: pastoral work and History. This is not to say that these two perspectives could not have been woven into a compelling sociological narrative for the students, just that for many (perhaps even most) they were not. Instead, they combined to make the students feel like they were spectators to a protracted autobiographical drama. Most students had little doubt that Sander's himself was a nice man, but many had also decided they were not going to learn much from him (e.g. Julie, Estelle). And while I dare say that he told quite a few interesting and informative stories, several even with sociological relevance (albeit tacit and indirect) most students had eventually seemed to give up trying to find the relevance of them.

Achebe and Sanders compared. In spite of many conspicuous differences between the two courses, Achebe and Sanders appeared to share a deep similarity. Each led courses where the textbook was both ever-present yet marginal – an extension of what had been established from the first day of class. Students in Achebe's class came to realize that they categorically did not need to read the textbook, at least in any serious sort of way. However I suggest that they *experienced* the slides as faithfully following the chapters in the textbook, the notes as representing the slides, and the exams mirrored exclusively in the notes.

In Sanders' class it was also unnecessary to read the textbook per se – at least in any comprehensive or synthetic manner to abstract meaning. A student was likely to bring the textbook to class as Sanders was fond of quoting from it and prone to indicating parts that would appear on the upcoming exam. For the exams themselves students would essentially reproduce part in the textbook they had been warned were about. Thus the *only* reading of the textbook that was necessary were those portions he underscored as important and "likely to appear" on the next test. So as marginal as the reading experience may have been to the course it was *the* exclusive and focal prop of every lesson. And just as it was impossible to fathom an Achebe lesson without slides, it was equally impossible to fathom a Sanders lesson without textbook and lectern.

In addition, just as Achebe (however unwittingly) conveyed a sense that his *notes* were the real content of the course, Sanders conveyed a sense that his anecdotes were the real content

of the lectures.[141] I suggest that as frequent as Sanders' quotations from the textbook were, their *presence* in the lecture comparatively incidental. Usually they were said quickly, in a noticeable down-speak while the corresponding anecdotes were relatively animated, elaborated and substantial. Much like a journalist's use of quotations, Sanders' quotations from the textbook were not so much to make a point, but appeared more to validate a point already made, as if the textbook conferred legitimacy on his anecdotes, and *not* vice versa.

Finally, all the instructors clearly varied in what they 'asked' of their students. And while all three demanded that their students listen; the form of Achebe and Sanders class itself suggested that the students should be "getting it down": for Achebe this was a matter of copying slides, for Sanders it was a matter of note taking.

Logan's Approach.

In contradistinction to the other two instructors, Logan did not rely on any one structure for most of her lessons, and her lectures were *not* efforts to reproduce the textbook. Instead, she sought to coax responses from the students, to re-phrase or re- frame them, so that they could be woven into claims compatible with the textbook.

In modeling comprehension she sought an inclusive tone. In the interchange above, from the very first sentence of "one might say" [001] there was a sense that the definitions were in some way provisional. First she elicited a response from the class, than she put it to them for evaluation and comment [003]. And when she elicited a perspective that was at odds with the textbook's meaning, it was neither deflated, nor endorsed [004-005], even suggesting that a textbook's definition itself was not unassailable [005]. In correcting the students' response she re-framed their answers. She showed how there was a way that the student's response was both correct and incorrect --Because one is born into a family, and because one's family is *already* of a particular social class, social class *cannot* be achieved; however, historical or intergenerational entities, family's also have social mobility; from this perspective social class could understood has reflecting an achieved status. Part of the lesson here was that such definitions relative -- ideas to help understand the social world better, rather than labels for different things found in the social environment. Finally, Logan showed how these definitions were inevitably "not

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141 Indeed, if everyone could read the textbook on their own, it was his complementary stories and histories that were expected to be the value added dimension of the course experience. Julie believed that that one of the course's problems was that Sanders approached it as if everyone read the textbook.

complete", and that their incompleteness becomes evident when we try to apply them to actual circumstances.[142]

Achebe and Sanders: Reproducing the Textbook.

Ultimately, Achebe and Sanders stood out for the single-mindedness of their approach to teaching. Their lessons never entailed the sort leading questions characteristic of Logan's. Their courses, taken as a whole, showed remarkably little variation in lesson structure. All Achebe lessons essentially reduced to PowerPoint slide driven lectures, while Sanders lessons easily reduced to anecdote-quotation driven ones.[143] Yet for Logan, in light of the many different kinds of instructional processes she employed, and her routine (if not litany) of questions to students, it would have been unwise to suggest a dominant structure in her lessons.[144] I suggest that the dominant lesson structures of Achebe and Sanders lessons underscore their efforts to *reproduce* the textbook for the students. For Achebe, the textbook was reproduced *as* slides, while for Sanders the textbook was reproduced *as* quotations.[145]

While the textbook was *the* unmistakable and vital organ at the heart of each of Achebe's and Sanders' *lectures,* alternatively it was but the backbone of Logan's *course.*[146] Although the actual physical textbook was *always* ready at hand in Sander's lectures, and *only* present by proxy in Achebe's (i.e. notes, exams, and slides), it had substantial and equal *presence* in both classrooms. And while the textbook had equal presence in both classrooms, their manifestations in each were certainly not *equivalent.* To make this point, I will conduct a brief foray into Peircean Semiotics.

Semiotics Interlude. Peircean semiotics (founded by Charles Sanders Peirce) is a significant and important contrast with Sausurrean semiotics (founded by Ferdinand de Sausurre). The latter is based on a familiar distinction between a *signifier* and *signified* -- as in

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[142] Alternatively chapter seven will show how Achebe and Sanders evinced *incorrect* definitions based instead on *imagined* circumstances.

[143] Both of these were *experientially* true for many students; however, the former seemed disproportionately more acceptable to many of the students than the latter.

[144] Professor Logan did have a dominant *lecture* style or structure. The *leading question* aspect of her approach was unmistakable -- especially as it seemed to punctuate her lectures into awkward pauses, questions she answered herself, or student responses offered as if in pity.

[145] In Sanders' lectures, quotations from the textbook were *illustrated* with anecdotes, but they were not *explained* otherwise!

[146] Only in the cases of Achebe and Sanders can the *course* (with rare exceptions) be exclusively identified with *lecture.*

the relationship between the written word "tree" and an actual tree. Hence Saussure's system of semiotics is *dyadic*. Peircean semiotics, on the other hand is *triadic* and vastly more complicated. The sign (or *representatmen* -- the thing doing the representing in Peirece's system) is irreducibly made up of a *sign*, an *object* and an interpretant[147].

Following this system I take the textbook to be a Peircean object, the signs for which are everywhere in these classrooms. While, following Peirce I take the interpretants to be *the significant effects* of those signs on the students. That is, according Peirce a sign is,

> "… anything which is so determined by something else, called its Object, and so determines an effect upon a person, which effect I call its interpretant, that the latter is thereby mediately determined by the former. (EP2, 478)"

Peirce's terminology is abstruse and complicated with numerous other triadic distinctions born of cross-cutting this three-part structure of a sign with his three fold understanding of experience. His most famous triad (besides sign, object and interpretant) and the one that most concerns us here, is *icon*, *index*, *symbol*. These refer to three different kinds of sign (the things doing the representing) the distinctions among them are related to the three kinds of relationships possible between an object and its sign --

> "The relationship between a sign and its dynamic object is most obvious in the case of indexical signs. That is, the "reference of a sign to its object is brought into special prominence" in an index (MS 7, 000016). In contrast, an icon is a sign that brings into special prominence its own qualitative structure, whereas a symbol does the same for its generative capacity (i.e. its capacity to generate interpretants) MS 7, 000015, 0000018)"

To sum up, icons represent via *resemblance*, indices represents because of some *actual contact,* and symbols represent by *convention* (Peirce, 1981). Consequently I take Sanders' quotations from the textbook are Peircean *indices* of it: they make *actual* and vivid connections to the textbook. Achebe neither quotes from the textbook, nor refers to it in lecture.   It is reproduced

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[147] Perceian scholars debate the meanings of all of these terms. However because Peirce used the word *sign* in at least two different ways (as seen above), his earlier writings distinguished the *representamen* from sign as I have shown).

only as slides. I take Achebe's slides as Peircean *icons* of the textbook. They represent the textbook by *resembling* it, by calling into prominence the slides own qualities: its spectacular public form, its sequential nature, of chapters within a whole, of slides/"pages" are imprinted upon and thus reproducible and permanent, and the notion of information as list[148].

This is but a technical way of saying that the textbook had a direct and unmediated presence in both classrooms; though the manner in which the textbook was made present was categorically different between the two situations. Through a use of quotations, the textbook was actually and concretely *pointed or touched*, alternatively the textbook was evoked by virtue of a slides own properties – that is slide and the textbook (in this classroom context) shared enough significant features that the presence of one could evoke that of the other. Thus, we observe two categorically different ways that the textbook was *simulated* in class.   Consequently, the stark and occasionally apposite differences between Achebe and Sanders are manifest in the categorically different ways of representing the textbook; however they were both equally committed to reproducing or simulating the textbook.

A semiotic perspective on teaching with textbooks. Beyond just reproducing the textbook, Achebe and Sanders stand out in their extreme efforts to do so, as evidenced by their overweening use of a single 'reproductive' technology. I suggest that in Sanders we see an *overvaluation of quotations*, while in Achebe, *an overvaluation of slides* (themselves embodied in 'notes'). Sanders' lessons essentially reduce to a string of quotation connected anecdotes and Achebe's, to segments in a single course-long slide show[149].

Sander's approached reading of Macionis as a History textbook – global, introductory, and decidedly more focused on contemporary matters, but a History text nonetheless. When he felt the book had missed just too many relevant historical details he would correct it accordingly in lecture.[150] Achebe gave no sense that the textbook needed to be complemented or corrected in any way. And with their attention squarely focused on reproducing the textbook, these instructors did not evince a transforming approach to reading characteristic of *deep* approaches

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[148] This was certainly not necessarily an exhaustive list of a slide's qualities.

[149] Ironically, their explicit appreciation of the textbook was balanced by how irrelevant the students perceived it to be to the overall course, certainly to their grades. Moreover, by restricting dialogue they were restricting access to the textbook.

[150] He appeared to be unaware of the deep and often contentious connections between History and Sociology (Abbott, 1981).

(Chapter 2).[151]

Logan did *not* appear to be reproducing the textbook. Indeed not all textbooks topics were represented in her course. Some were focused on, others skipped outright. Indeed she was also the only instructor to skip an entire chapter! Although she followed the order of chapters as they were presented in the textbook, she nonetheless arranged them as she saw fit—again omitting some and lingering over others. Alternatively, the other two instructors rigidly adhered to the sequence of topics presented in the *textbook*. Of course Sanders and Achebe lectured on *all* chapters, touching most topics, advancing through the text at a uniform rate.

In Logan's class, by contrast, the material was presented as if in fits and starts, and the textbook itself was presented only *indirect*ly– using what Peirce called *symbols*. Her lectures always entailed questions, the tweaking of student responses, an exchange of words for terms in the text -- or the exchange of everyday words for textual/sociological *symbols*. The responses she planned (and those she did not) were self-consciously verbal interventions highlighting sociology as language *and thus with a capacity for being applied to new contexts* -- what Peirce took to be the particularly generative capacity of *symbols*.   Again semiotically, Logan was not concerned to reproduce the textbook but rather to represent Sociology as a focus on a specific use of specific words, on their capacity to generalize from otherwise unique situations. Nevertheless, in the next chapter, I examine the two professors who were much more direct in their representation of the textbook, who approached their textbooks as if reproducing them.

As mentioned above, Peirce's architectonic philosophical system was also based on a fundamental three-fold division of experience itself: Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness. Without going into the details of the connections, *Firstness* is related to icons, *Secondness* to indices and *Thirdness* to symbols. Each refers to three different kinds of experience: *possibility*, *actuality* and *necessity* (Peirce, 1981). Achebe and Sanders' commitment to reproducing the textbook, coupled with the textbooks encyclopedic comprehension of Sociology, powerfully represent the discipline of Sociology itself. However, as I will go on to show in the next chapter, having a feeling about sociology, knowing that it is a *possibility* (i.e. Achebe), even touching sociology, knowing that it is an actuality (i.e. Sanders) can come at the expense of knowing sociology as a discipline --an experience of everyday words, which, out *of necessity,* must be

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[151] I do not think that being a Historian necessarily made reading the textbook a tricky proposition. I think being a Historian, reading an Encyclopedic Sociology textbook at a community college on the other hand is a tall order.

used differently. In sum, these three different approaches to teaching sociology are associated not only with different ways of representing the focal text, but also with categorically different ways of experiencing Sociology in the classroom.

Chapter 7

Textbook Content Reinterpreted in Lectures

"There's no one who really looks at the content of my teaching or who's currently interested in my research…I could be saying things that are totally absolutely wrong and they would not know the difference."

--Anthropology Instructor (from *Honored but Invisible, An Inside look at Teaching in Community Colleges*, Grubb & Associates, 1999, p 217.

    The following chapter takes-up the instructor's challenge quoted above and focuses on the content of Achebe and Sander's lectures. Of the audio-recorded lessons where I had representations from all three instructors, I chose one lesson to examine in detail. Specifically, I focused on Achebe and Sanders' lectures on Chapter 3 of the textbook, the chapter on socialization -- a pivotal chapter for introducing many of the goals deemed significant to the Introductory Sociology course (Pfeffer & Syed, 2007). If Achebe and Sanders had distinguished themselves in terms of form, creating courses comprised overwhelmingly of lectures on the textbook, I turn now to the content of those lectures and to their sociological quality.

    Below I compare samples of content drawn from a single lesson to its origins in the textbook, comparing the sociology inscribed in the text with its interpretations in lecture. In doing so, I describe a shared commitment to "common sense" among the two instructors as they reproduced the textbook for their students. Moreover, I suggest that this reproduction reflects a "surface" reading of the textbooks and ultimately in Chapter 7 conjecture that such surface (and/or deep) readings, not only influence students classroom experiences, but those experiences stand to have implications for their persistence.

    This chapter describes a keenly ironic situation whereby instructors who appeared to faithfully reproduce a textbook chapter systematically mis-interpreted it. In light of how few students appeared to actually read the textbook, the absence of teaching techniques other than

lectures, and the paucity of classroom discussion (Chapter 6), any engagement with Sociology was likely determined by theses lectures, or in Achebe's case, by the notes that his lectures were based on. Finally, although Achebe and Sanders may have approached their classrooms in very different ways (Chapter 5); they were similar in their approaches to reading the textbook: both seemed prone to miss opportunities for a *deep* reading of them. Ultimately, this was highly suggestive of the students' own opportunities to learn sociology.

The Goals of Sociology

To place comparisons between textbook and lecture in context, I first establish a basic set of meanings for introductory courses in general. These meanings were isolated in the research work of Pfeffer & Syed (2007) who isolated the principal learning goals for introductory sociology courses as understood by "discipline leaders" within the field:

1) The "social" part of sociology, or learning to think sociologically.
2) The scientific nature of sociology
3) Complex and critical thinking
4) The centrality of inequality
5) A sense of sociology as a field
6) The social construction of ideas
7) The difference between sociology and other social sciences
8) The importance of trying to improve the world
9) The importance of institutions.

Over the course of this chapter it will become evident how Macionis, sought to communicate many of these goals in the textbook.[152] However, my analysis of the Achebe and Sanders cases unveils conspicuous instances of *missed* opportunities to forward these goals, opportunities that a deeper reading of the textbook might have seized.

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[152] In a special issue of the Journal, *Teaching Sociology,* Pfeffer and Syed (2007) attempted to gather together a representative sample of individuals deemed to be consensus "discipline leaders" within sociology, and interviewed them about what they believed the goals of introductory sociology courses should be.

Macionis' Textbook: Chapter Three

The Basic Textbook structure

If the textbook can be understood in light of the goals for introductory courses in general, its specific meanings can be understood simply by examining the textbook's structure. Specifically, the structure of headings within an actual textbook chapter not only outlines that chapter's topics but reflects their interrelationships and significance.[153] Hence, textbook content is essentially a set of topics organized into thematic chapters, each chapter organized further still by a *hierarchical* structure of sub-topics. It is this hierarchical structure that helps a reader appreciate that *not* all topics or sub-topics are created equal!

Macionis' textbook, *Society: The Basics* (2008) is comprised of 16 main themes (i.e. chapters) -- each of these themes is subdivided into topics and sub-topics ---evident in the system of textbook headings is the following generic structure applicable to all of the textbook's chapters. The structure could be diagrammed as follows:

1. Theme (i.e. chapter Title)
    a. Topic
        i. Sub-Topic
            1. Elementary Topic[154]

Again, though Professor Achebe and Sanders lectured on all sixteen chapters of the textbook, I will examine but portions of one --chapter four, entitled, *Socialization: from Infancy to old age.*[155] The structure of the chapter as a whole looks as follows:

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[153] The hierarchical structure of a chapter is reflected in the layout of the textbook itself. Each different level in a theme's structure (e.g. topic, subtopic, elementary topic) is introduced by a heading, and each heading *level* is written out in its own color and font size. The font sizes of all headings are larger than the font used for the body of the text; however, whereas themes, topics and subtopics each have their own color, 'elementary topic' headings', like the body of the text, are written in black. Finally, the chapter titles themselves (or the themes of sociology) are set apart: they are written in the largest fonts, cover two facing pages, and across relevantly themed photographs.

[154] The terms for these topic levels are my own. They are the constitutive *parts* of the textbooks' sequence of thematic *wholes*.

[155] The chapter on Socialization in the Macionis textbook is one of the textbook's most explicit efforts to convey to its readers that an everyday common sense view of themselves is not exactly true. The idea that there is a unique *you* out there in the world, a you with a unique set of tastes and experiences that frame a set of choices otherwise freely made, from a sociological perspective is at best half the truth.

4   Socialization: From Infancy to Old Age

    a. Social Experience the key to our humanity

        i.   Human Development: Nature and Nurture

        ii. Social Isolation

    b. Understanding Socialization

        i.   Sigmund Freud`s Elements of Personality

        ii.   Jean Piaget`s Theory of Cognitive Development

        iii. Lawrence Kohlberg`s Theory of Moral Development

        iv.   Carol Gilligan`s Theory of Gender and Moral Development

        v.   George Herbert Meade`s Theory of the Social Self

        vi.   Erik H. Erikson`s Eight Stages of Development

    c. Agent of Socialization

        i.   The Family

        ii.   The School

        iii. The Peer Group

        iv.   The Mass Media

    d. Socialization and the Life Course

        i.   Childhood

        ii.   Adolescence

        iii. Adulthood

        iv.   Old Age

        v.   Death and Dying

        vi.   The Life Course": Patterns and Variations

    e. Resocialization: Total Institutions

More than just the "key to our humanity", I shall endeavor below to show that the concept of *social experiences* is a key to understanding the chapter 3 in the textbook, to understanding

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Though who you are is grounded in an individual and unique biological body, biology is not destiny; who you are is also a product of *social* processes, hence ones tastes and experiences are not idiosyncratic but systematically distributed.

socialization, and, sociology. However when the concept as described in the textbook is compared with how it is interpreted in lecture, the latter is found to be inadequate and misleading.

"Social Experience": Introductory Concept and Analytic Key for Chapter 3

The chapter opens with the tragic case of Anna, a 5 year-old girl kept locked away in a second floor storage room and deprived of any human contact since the day she was born. Anna was provided with just enough milk to keep her alive.   When she was found she was not only emaciated but "she could not laugh, speak or even smile. Anna was completely unresponsive, as if alone in an empty world" (Macionis, 2008 p. 72).

The chapter could be read as an effort to respond to this opening vignette – an extended explanation of the causal connections between being "alone", being found "completely unresponsive", and the fact that Anna's recovery was never fully complete, that "five years of social isolation had caused permanent damage" (p. 73).   The short answer that explains why is *social experience*, or lack thereof.

Social experience was the fundamental concept (or topic) of the chapter and according to the textbook, the "key to our humanity". It was identified with *socialization* itself and was key not only to the coherence of the first section, but for the chapter as whole. It is the chapter's first topic, providing its readers with an analytic frame for unpacking socialization as a process along both its personal and interpersonal dimensions.

 Immediately following the vignette about Anna and beneath the heading, "Social Experience: The Key to Our Humanity" were two paragraphs. The first two sentences of each paragraph read as follows:

> "Socialization is so basic to human development that we sometimes overlook its importance … Sociologists use the term **socialization** to refer to the *lifelong social experience by which people develop their human potential and learn culture*. Unlike other species, whose behavior set, humans need social experience to learn their culture and to survive. Social experience is also the basis of **personality**, *a person`s fairly consistent patterns of acting, thinking and feeling. (p. 72)* [my underlining, all other

emphases in the original][156]

Within these sentences are many of the chapter's other important unifying concepts, woven into coherent paragraph whole. Of note is also the fact that embedded within this opening paragraph is a warning to readers how easy it is to overlook the significance of these concepts (i.e. "*we sometimes overlook its importance*"). In addition to the concepts of "socialization" and "personality" bolded in the original, I have underlined "human development", "social experience", and "learn culture", completing the set of concepts critical to a full and *deep* understanding of this chapter.

In the remainder of this chapter, I summarize Macionis overall argument in the textbook chapter as an elaboration on the concept of social experiences. Next I point out the basic meanings provided by the initial set of chapter headings. I then drill down to Achebe's own interpretation of this opening section, focusing on the role and relevance of *social experience* in his lecture. Next the chapter reduces to a side-by-side examination lecture and textbook content covering the three subtopics under the "social experience" heading: *Human Development: Nature and Nurture, Social Isolation, and Sigmund Freud's elements of personality*. Next I move to Professor Sanders' lecture on the same chapter. Specifically, I compare Professor Sander's lecture on the topics of *George Herbert Mead* and *Agents of socialization* with their origins in the textbook.

Chapter 3: The overall argument.

Before examining exactly how Professor Achebe presented chapter three's introductory topic, I sketch the meaning of the chapter as a whole. Following the opening topic on *social experience* was the topic, "Understanding Socialization", itself made up of several sections, each based on a different theorist their theories (i.e. Freud, Piaget, Kohlberg, Gilligan, Meade, and Erikson). In addition to the differences in content and purposes of these theories, the textbook showed how each was significant for *delimiting* the role of biological instincts in our understanding human development. Essentially Macionis argued that these theories have helped

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[156] Before beginning with the analysis, I would like to underscore that the words written in bold and phrases italicized are in the original, and reflect Macionis' own efforts to underscore the significant ideas at stake in the passage. I have underlined several others concepts, critical to the chapter as a whole, yet omitted in lecture.

us to understand the relative significance of social forces *over* biological factors in our lives. They describe how people are *not* born with fully formed personalities but that they develop instead through a lifetime of *social experiences*.

Moreover, not only do our personalities emerge from social experiences but our capacities for such experiences develop along several dimensions. For example, while Piaget described the development or our capacity to cognitively frame social experiences, Kohlberg and Gilligan described the development of our ability to morally frame them. Meade`s theory on the other hand stands-out as the strongest claim for the force of society in shaping personalities, arguing that biology is entirely *irrelevant* in the matter. His theory was critical as it was the only one to describe a social mechanism that "*explains how* social experience develops an individual`s personality" (p. 77) [my italics]. Finally, Erikson`s theory described how social experiences constitute a life-long narrative: one that unfurls from birth to death through a series of social "challenges" that individuals must overcome across the life-course.

The textbook then moved on to the concept of "agents of socialization." Here the reader is told that not all social experiences are created equal; not all have equal implications for our personalities. Several constitute "familiar settings that have special importance in the socialization process": the "family", the "school", the "peer group", and the "mass media." Each was described under its own sub-topic heading (see above). Next was a description of how social experiences are systematically distributed and organized in society according to age (e.g. childhood, adolescence, adulthood, old age, death and dying). Specifically, how aging, though inextricably biological, "the life course [on the other hand] is a social construction." (p. 89). From a *sociological* perspective we must be careful that our grasp of humanity is not occluded by a rigid biological determinism, that we appreciate the surprisingly large dimensions for agency, or social determinism. This perspective expands our appreciation of human variation, not the least of which is cultural. Indeed, one implication of a socially constructed aging process is that "people from different societies may experience a stage of life quite differently or not at all" (p. 89).

The chapter's final topic entitled, *Re-socialization, Total Institutions* reaffirmed the significance of social experiences, this time by describing processes that seek to radically engineer and manage them (e.g. prisons, mental institutions, hospitals and monasteries). These very special institutions are capable of strictly delimiting freedoms such that the individuals

socialized within them *learn* to take on *new* personalities! These examples describe the intensive and total learning process that occurs within institutions kept artificially apart from society. They underscore the power of social institutions to manufacture social experiences that change personalities. Together topics of this chapter help us to understand why Anna's seclusion was *so* damaging, that by depriving her of social experiences she was deprived of a fundamental dynamic, one critical to who we are both as individuals and as a species.

Chapter 3: Structural elaboration of "social experience"

Returning to the chapter's initial topic, *Social Experience: The key to our humanity* we see the following structure of topics and headings:

1) Socialization: From Infancy to Old Age
   a) Social Experience: The key to our Humanity
      i) <u>Human Development:</u> Nature and Nurture
         (1) The Biological Sciences: The Role of Nature
         (2) The Social Sciences: The Role of Nurture
      ii) Social Isolation
         (1) Research with Monkeys
         (2) Studies of Isolated Children [my underlining]

These headings alone suggest that concept of *human development* is a concern of *both* the biological and the social sciences. While biology is concerned with "the role of nature" in human development, the social sciences are concerned with "the role of nurture." In the textbook each approach was described as matters of intellectual history. The historical effort to understand humanity through the lens of "nature" and biology was reflected in the popular notion that behavior was *instinctive.* According to the textbook, this perspective is in fact a "misinterpretation" of Charles Darwin's work (Macionis, 2008 p. 73). On the other had the textbook notes that in the history of the study of humanity, John Watson's *behaviorism*, representing the "nurture" and social science side of the equation, was the corrective to the commonly misunderstood Darwinian view -- Watson argued that "[b]]ehavior [was] not instinctive, but learned" (Macionis, 2008 p. 73).

Essentially the chapter describes a form of *learning* that occurs through *social experience*. To underscore its significance, it first sought to describe what happens when it is not present, in the cases of *social isolation*. In addition, the textbook also stipulated that the significance of *social experience* was based on two lines of "evidence": 1) "research with monkeys" and 2) "studies of isolated children" (p.76). Ultimately, the beginning of chapter three introduces the significance of *social experience* while the remaining topics in the chapter elaborate on it, tying it to the process of *socialization* itself. However this is not how Professor Achebe presented the chapter. Though he was clearly lecturing from the textbook, his lectures did *not* underscore the importance of social experience and they missed opportunities (otherwise taken by Macionis) to describe the significance of a sociological perspective. Indeed in missing these opportunities Achebe appeared to *contradict* the textbook.

Professor Achebe's Representation of Chapter 3

This section describes several instances where Professor Achebe's lecture either *contradicted* the textbook or was ambiguous in his use of it. As the series of topics presented in the textbook usually mirrored the content in lecture, it was easy to see when and how one departed from the other.

Socialization already understood: Social experience minimized.
Although the concept of *social experiences* was pivotal in the chapter, and critical to this textbook's sociological elaboration upon the concept of *socialization*, it played only a marginal role in Achebe's lecture. Moreover, he implied that the concept of socialization, as a matter of *common sense*, needed no special elaboration. His entire lecture on socialization made reference to the term *social experience* only twice, and when he did so its meaning was imprecise and insignificant. From the outset, Achebe seemed less interested in clearing away the brush around difficult concepts than convincing students that concepts such as socialization were phenomena, which, because they had already lived through them, they already understood.

Alternatively, in a nod to the unique dilemmas faced by the social sciences, Macionis noted how easy it was to mistake the significance of such concepts. For example, regarding *socialization* he pointed out that it, " … is so basic to human development that we sometimes

overlook its importance" (p. 72). Achebe evinced no such concern or ambivalence! Whereas Macionis suggested that students' prior familiarity with social phenomena represents a challenge to comprehending them sociologically, Achebe stressed instead that students' prior familiarity with these phenomena was the key to understanding them. To illustrate these points, I quote directly from the very beginning of that day's lecture, interrupting the flow briefly for comparison and analysis.

> "Ok, we are on Chapter 3. And it talks about socialization. We all understand what socialization is all about. We have all gone through socialization and we still continue to go through socialization." PD 15:199

Moreover, one implication of our familiarity with socialization was that it warranted examples *rather* than definitions. Thus Achebe continued:

> "We are socialized every time and then we meet new people and new environments and so forth, you get socialized". [PD 15:199]

At best, this is a tautological definition of socialization.

The textbook on the other hand approached the concept of socialization as requiring not only definitions, but a full chapter to explain! As noted above, the textbook defined socialization as a "life-long process … whereby we gain social experiences" which it will elaborate upon over the chapter. The corresponding introduction of Achebe's lecture stated:

> "So socialization is what we call a life-long process, whereby we experience what we call social, we gain social experience. It starts from the time we are born until we die. It does not end because we are 18 years old. It does not end because we are at 65 years old. It does not end because you are adults. NO! It ends when we die"

And while Achebe had also used the terms "life-long", "social experiences" and "processes," he glued them together with much less precision. Indeed they seemed put together as if to describe the concept of "life-long" and *not* for the systematic elaboration upon a definition of socialization.

Hence Achebe's claim above was peculiar. His efforts to elaborate on a lay term that needed little elaboration (i.e. life-long) while neglecting a sociological concept that could have used some (i.e. socialization) were odd. Also odd was the repeated and ambiguous uses of the pronoun *we* (9 Times). On the one hand, it referred to sociologists in particular, on the other, to people in general. I suggest *we's* ambiguous reference foreshadowed an image of sociology as something *not* appreciably different from commonsense and akin to a perspective students presumably had upon entering the class. Granting that socialization is "what we call a life-long process", perhaps it is only of academic concern whether we are talking we, sociologists? English speakers? Americans? In the collective *we* of common sense, such distinctions are irrelevant to the conversational task at hand.

Following Schleppegrell, (2004) I suggest, however, that such imprecision in terminology befits a vernacular rather than an academic register. Indeed, there is little to suggest that an academic register would be needed in the first place. In lieu of precise definitions, Achebe's lecture continued with examples:

"Right when you are born, you, as a baby, you socialize your parents too. As you socialize your parents they socialize you (pause). The kids socialize parents as. Because if you are not a mom you have not learned how to be a mom. That kid is making you learn how to be a mom. If you are not a dad, that kid is making you learn how to be a dad. That's how kids socialize their parents."

This statement was rife with ambiguities. It could have been elaborating on *social experiences*, on *socialization* or on *social roles*; a listener cannot be sure. The example employed a concept of learning, itself a significant component of the chapter's overall argument. Yet learning, as used above, was indistinguishable from the learning that takes place in classrooms. Thus, it does not appear to help students better appreciate the social and informal learning at stake in this chapter, much less differentiate between *cultural learning* and *instinct,* the crux of its use in this chapter.

Returning to the concept of social experience, the lecture's next assertion seemed promising at first, yet rather than pursue a textbook-inspired departure, it fell back upon a relatively conventional claim. Achebe continued,

"Social experience conforms many crucial roles in forming our personality (pause). If you have done psychology, this is what I term as a psychological chapter in sociology."

In light of the textbook, a notion that social experience plays a "role" in personality formation is a conspicuous understatement. The textbook did *not* suggest that social experience played *a* part in making us who we are, but rather, it was *the* single most important thing that made us human. It made our personalities! Finally, students capacity to appreciate the significance of the concept of *social experience* was undermined further still by relating it to a *psychological* perspective[157] -- A tricky if not cavalier claim within a chapter that endeavors to show how psychologies can be perceived sociologically.

Elaborating on social experience in the textbook. Again, the series of topics covered in Achebe's lecture usually mirrored the order in which they appeared in the textbook.[158] Consequently we would expect "social experience" to be elaborated in terms of the following topics:

1. The Biological Sciences: The Role of Nature
2. The Social Sciences: The Role of Nurture
3. Research with monkeys
4. Studies of Isolated children

However Achebe's lecture deviated from this plan. In particular, the topic referred to as "Studies of isolated children "was moved to the top of the order, while "Research with monkeys" was omitted entirely.

This portion of his lecture employed none of the four organizing headings listed above. Consequently, Achebe omitted the *contrast* between the biological and the social sciences

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[157] More than undermining the text, this sort or presentation runs the risk of undermining some of the key themes "sociology leaders" suggested should be communicated in introductory sociology courses (e.g. "The 'social' part of sociology, or learning to think sociologically", and "The difference between sociology and other social sciences" come immediately to mind). See list above.

[158] I attended about 70% of his lectures and they did not vary in form. And for every class that I missed, I asked one of the students what happened when I was gone. The only class that differed from the rest was the one in which I presented myself and asked for their informed consent.

highlighted in the textbook. Instead, he made a set of claims about Charles Darwin and John Watson, however, the connections between the two (encapsulated in the headings) was left largely un-drawn. In addition in the textbook, the topic of *isolated children* was presented a form of evidence that supports the overall argument for the significance of social experience. Yet in lecture it was not clear what larger argument the concept of *social isolation* was relevant for. Indeed, the fact that it was a concept itself was lost. Consequently, it was reduced to a mere description perhaps even equivalent to the phrase 'lack of human contact'.

'Studies of isolated children': a lecture in the vernacular

Compared to the textbook, Achebe' s description of socially isolated children was conspicuously vernacular in tone and content: His lecture continued,

> "So kids who are isolated, who are <u>socialized in isolation</u>, <u>tend to find themselves</u>
> <u>socially disturbed</u>, because they may not know how to behave or act in front of a different
> group. It's almost <u>like getting a cultural shock</u>, because you are exposed to certain things,
> you were not exposed to before. So you don't know what to do, how to behave. So we
> have three kids who are socially isolated from humans[159]
> Genie, please make sure you spell with a capital 'G', the small 'g' should be a capital G. -
> -Isabel Anna and Geine, these three had no human support, they were isolated and
> therefore <u>they found themselves socially disturbed</u>. " [my underlines]

While the textbook ultimately referred to two cases of "isolated children" -- Isabell and Anna, Professor Achebe added a third, Genie. Here, he is pointing out to students who are copying down the information presented on the slides, that the 'G' in Genie, as a proper noun, should be capitalized. Thus, I suggest that however small, this act was symbolic of an unremitting attention to, and an elevation of incidental information to the level of course content.

Nonetheless Achebe *seemed* to employ the systematic distinctions that characterize an academic register (Schleppegrell, 2004). In particular, *personality*, *social experience*, *learning*, *socialized* and *isolation* are all lexical elements from the textbook. Yet their use in these lectures was uncharacteristically loose for an academic register.   For example, it is likely much too facile

to claim that one can be "socialized in isolation." Although our lay understanding of terms is sufficient to understand what Professor Achebe's meant, from the perspective of an academic register, the two terms are contradictory! By definition one cannot, be socialized in isolation -- being isolated *is* the absence of socialization. In the vernacular one can perhaps be *socialized in* anything; yet such phraseology likely muddles matters in sociology.

Specifically, the textbook defines the concept of *isolation* as, "the absence of social experience". Achebe's claim that "kids who are isolated can "tend to find themselves socially disturbed" also seems to understate the effects of social isolation. Moreover, such cavalier phraseology not only fails to distinguish adequately between psychology, sociology and common sense, but it hides the causality of *social* forces in human lives, obscuring the chapter's fundamental point -- that in the absence of social experiences, *personality* itself does not develop! Again the imprecise use of terms in lecture characterizes a vernacular rather than an academic (or scientific) register.

'Culture Shock': an instance of the vernacular.

Similarly, Achebe's use of the term *culture shock* as a simile to describe the experience of reintegrating back into society after social isolation makes for dramatic imagery,[160] but works against the focus of the chapter. His use of *culture shock* misinterprets again one of the central meanings in the chapter. The chapter was *not* focused on the overwhelming experience of the social after period's prolonged social deprivation. Rather, it argued that children who experience social isolation early in their *development* fail to acquire the linguistic and social skills that had otherwise been their biological birthright.

The term *culture shock* itself had actually been defined in the textbook's preceding chapter as a "personal disorientation when experiencing an unfamiliar way of life" (p.42)). Hence Achebe's claim amounted to implying that the experience of a child returning to the modern world after years of social isolation was equivalent to encountering an *unfamiliar way of life.*[161] Yet the chapter in point of fact was arguing that such a child was essentially being reintroduced to *the uniquely human* way of life. Perhaps sociology novices should not be taught that the

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[160] While emerging from social isolation and say arriving in Japan as a monolingual American might both be shocking, it is a vernacular sense of *shock* that unites them. This is underscored by his vernacular syntax of "getting a culture shock" described in the lecture, as if metaphorically sticking one's finger in an electrical outlet and getting shocked.

[161] Filmic images of Tarzan and literary images of Babar notwithstanding.

experience of a clash of cultures is *equivalent* to the experience of "learning culture" itself! At the very least, such a claim might require qualification: as the former refers to a uniquely self-reflexive event, the later to a fundamental absence of a self to begin with.

It might be especially difficult to distinguish social science terms from concepts associated with everyday life. Yet failing to do so makes the value of a sociological perspective all the more difficult for a novice to discern. And if the sociological perspective has little to offer beyond what students already know, why bother? Indeed, as we shall see below, what was to have been an argument about the significance of a social science perspective in the textbook, became a lecture on facts associated with Charles Darwin and John Watson.

Lecturing on Darwin: about concepts already known.

After a long pause, the lecture transitioned from socialization to Charles Darwin.

Achebe: How many of us know, or have heard of Charles? (Referring to the slide of Charles Darwin on the screen).

Student1: Survival of the fittest

Achebe: If you have done Anthropology, or if you have done Biology you will have come across Charles Darwin. Darwin talks about the traits. Human traits, and he talks how they then can survival (pause). Therefore the strong ones tend to survive, better than the weakest. And this is why I tell my American friends, students, sometimes I often notice that, adds (i.e. advertisements), where women are looking for men, and the woman is saying, I am looking for this, tall, handsome, strong, *man!* (his dramatic emphasis)

Cheeky-boy: I'm right here! (Students laugh)

Ayshe: "I don't think that's it anymore. I think you need a *job*, a car, education".

Achebe: *Giggles*, *smiles*, then responds, "Loaded"

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Student 1: "Loaded"

Achebe: "The man must be loaded"

A: No more tall, handsome, strong.

Student 1: Handsome, is just a perk now.

Ayshe: Yeah

Achebe: I always ask my students and my friends -- women are looking for this tall, handsome, strong male, but what happens to dwarfs like me? (*Giggles in class*). Ugly ones like me? (He giggles). Why you leaving the ugly ones? Who's going to marry the ugly? It is just what Charles Darwin is talking about. We want the ugly ones to fade away from the scene, to disappear. We want to have a superior species. Those tall, strong handsome men, to have species of their own, to, you know, kind of procreate (to be in love??) (*some rumbling in the class*)

Achebe: So that is what Charles Darwin is talking about survival of the fittest. You know? (PD 015: 205-228)

Under the aegis of following the textbook, and for their attention, students were given humor rather than textbook content.

Vernacular: Distinctions missed

The exchange above was associated with content under the heading, "The Biological Sciences: The Role of Nature" (within which Charles Darwin did indeed figure prominently). From the sequence of headings alone we can tell that this section was meant to be about more than just Darwin -- at a minimum, the Nature vs. Nurture debate and its relationship to human development. The debate itself was meant to be an elaboration of the topic, "Social Experience:

The key to our humanity." Yet again these larger connections were not apparent in lecture.

The textbook argued that the social sciences were a correction for the "mistaken" views of humanity that misrepresentations of Darwin's theory had ushered in. Prior to the social sciences the "role of nature" had been exaggerated. "People *mistakenly* believed that humans were born with instincts that determined their personality and behavior" (p. 72) (my emphasis). Hence, this section of textbook dabbled in the intellectual history of the social sciences, while Achebe's lecture focused on re-affirming the association of Charles Darwin with the phrase, "survival of the fittest". It is important to recognize that this is a relatively commonplace association. Like $e=mc^2$ it is a piece scientific popular culture provided, that in point of fact was even provided by one of the students (see above).

Vernacular: obscuring sociological distinctions

Achebe's use of the vernacular was well suited to the needs of humor, if not always sociology. I suggest that humor and vernacular together facilitated a loose and casual connection between major ideas from the textbook, some of which simply fall out of the account, others accidentally contradicted. While humor in teaching can certainly be of tremendous value in teaching in general, it has undermined some of Achebe's efforts to communicate sociological content. When he asked the students, "Why you leaving the ugly ones? Or who's going to marry the ugly?" and, " what happens to dwarfs like me", though said jokingly, the pedagogical context of these questions suggested they had intellectual merit as well. Moreover, these questions were identified explicitly with Darwin's theory itself (i.e. "It is just what Darwin is talking about").

And yet this was *not* what Darwin was talking about! Though Darwin does talk of evolution as Achebe suggested, he certainly does not do so in the anthropocentric manner employed by Achebe. As we saw above, Achebe describes the evolutionary process as one in which,

> "[w]e want the ugly ones to fade away from the scene, to disappear. We want to have a superior species. Those tall, strong handsome men, to have species of their own, to, you know, kind of procreate (to be in love??) (*some rumbling in the class*)"

These claims follow neither from the text nor from evolutionary biology. Moreover, they are much too reductionistic, imprecise and unqualified for the critical thinking learning goals of higher education (Bowen, 1997) or for the learning objectives of introductory sociology itself (see above).

Like "culture shock" the textbook had already introduced Charles Darwin and evolution in the previous chapter.[162] In point of fact, it avoided using the problematic (if popular) phrase "survival of the fittest." Macionis (like Darwin) identified evolution with the concept of "natural selection" and described it as operating according to four principles. The third principle explained how random variations in genes allowed for "each species" to " 'try out' new life patterns in a particular environment" (p. 63), and that it was "[t]his variation [that] enable[d] some organisms to survive better and pass on their advantageous genes to their offspring" (p. 63). Consequently, the concepts of *survival* and *fitness* in addition to possessing very precise meanings have significant inter-generational and *impersonal* dimensions. Thus *not* endowing evolution with a purpose is critical to understanding Darwinian evolution. It is what prominent evolutionary biologists (and popular scientific writer) Richard Dawkins called, a "*Blind Watchmaker*" (Dawkins, 1986). As the concept of *natural selection* itself was meant to underscore the existence of an *impersonal*, selective force, and precisely to avoid covering something like one's personal attraction for another.[163]

Thus Achebe's related claim that "we" humans "want to have a superior species" is on no firmer evolutionary grounds. Eminent paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould[164] showed how such beliefs, along with *all* notions of evolution as embodying "… a fundamental trend or thrust leading to a primary and defining result" (Gould, 1996 p. 19) rest upon the commonplace "fallacy" of "progress." Contrary to Achebe's description, in Darwinian evolution there is no "we" to "want" a superior species, nor a "superior" or "fittest" idea for evolution to achieve.

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[162] It was covered in chapter two, on "culture". In this chapter, the textbook described *sociobiology* as "a theoretical approach standing with one leg in biology and the other in sociology" (p. 62).

[163] That is to say nothing of the fact that in a textbook with separate chapters devoted to *Marriage and the family* and *Sexuality*, the question, "Who is going to marry the ugly", could actually could be phrased *and* answered sociologically.

[164] Neither Gould nor Dawkins were elements of Macionis' text or Achebe's lecture. Both however are not only prominent within their fields (paleontology and evolutionary biology respectively) but they are two of the most significant popularizers of science in a generation. Thus, they have been very successful at making *problems* for common sense then setting up widely-accessible scientific solutions to explain them. Indeed, compared to the textbook, these authors have not necessarily sought to introduce a discipline but to intervene in common sense.

Gould's work has cataloged how very common such teleological miss-readings or "spins" on Darwin truly are, how "progress" (and the image of a ladder that it often entails) is a dominant metaphor in Western culture, one 'we've' been reluctant to part with and one that has in fact kept us from "completing" the Darwinian Revolution.[165]

Sociological understanding as impeded by its familiarity

Achebe began the Darwin part of the lecture suggesting that if you had already taken Biology or Anthropology classes you were likely already familiar with Charles Darwin. Yet Darwin is also an element of popular culture. One is likely already familiar Darwin whether having taken such courses or not. And as has Gould painstakingly laid out, in the popular imagination, Darwin is indeed associated with such phrase like "survival of the fittest." The fact that the phrase "survival of the fittest" was provided by one of the students supports the idea that it represents a knowledge the students already come to class with. That Achebe ends this portion of the lecture by reaffirming Darwin's association with the phrase, is to affirm the students sociologically incorrect contribution.

Alternatively Macionis also drew on Darwin to start the Socialization chapter:

> "Charles Darwin`s groundbreaking study of evolution described in Chapter 2 ("Culture") led people to incorrectly think that human behavior was instinctive, simply our nature." (Macionis, p. 72).

Setting up the discussion so, by referring to a previous chapter, Macionis implicitly reminded his readers that *in spite* of their prior familiarity with Charles Darwin, their understandings should nonetheless emanate from information provided earlier in the textbook:

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[165] Ironically, Achebe's presentation of Darwin could itself be construed as within the tradition of misinterpretations of Darwin's theory. The only qualification provided in class for the "survival of the fittest" assertion was a pseudo sociobiological set of comments about attraction. Ultimately the connections between "survival of the fittest" and sociobiology are complex, and how either could be related to socialization is not addressed in lecture.

Excessive familiarity with Watson and the prescriptive/descriptive distinction

Finished with Darwin, the lecture then jumped to Watson. In the textbook, material on Watson was located under the heading, *Social Sciences: The Role of Nurture*. Yet this distinction between the social and the biological sciences, or for that matter nature and nurture, was not maintained in lecture. Just as the discussion about Darwin, above, was distilled from the Biological Sciences, the lecture on Watson, below, is what remained of the section on the social sciences. Rather than breaking the lecture into segments as in the Darwin portion above, I will simply quote without interruption.

> "John Watson talks about behavior. It`s not instinctive. We all learn how to behave in whatever situation it is and so forth. Ok. So its not instinctive, but we learn. Where social scientists tend to caution that we should not dismiss or disregard instinctiveness. You should also know there are certain things that are instinctive, others also learned. And when they are using that aspect, sometimes, some of us have said, homosexuality is a behavior we learned, but they are saying no. There are lots of people who are born with some of those genetic, whatever it is and so forth. So you have to try to *balance*. There are situations where you find, yes the people inherit, other people learn. Ok. Don't dismiss any of that other behaviors." (PD 015: 230). [my italics]

According to Achebe, like the socialization we understand because we have gone through it, the *learned* dimension of behavior is also grasped easily because we are already familiar with it. "We all learn how to behave in whatever situation it is and so forth" (above).[166] It is also worth noting the ambiguity of Achebe's description; this content seems to straddle a discussion on *proper* behavior in particular, and a discussion about the emergence of behavior in general.   Yet learning "to behave*"* is not the same thing as learning *about behavior,* or at least academic registers strive to keep the descriptive from the prescriptive categorically apart. Indeed doing so is much less important in vernacular speech (Schleppegrell, 2004) or common sense (Geertz, 1985).

Both Achebe and the textbook distinguished between *learned* and *instinctive* behaviors. But they did so in very different ways. Ultimately Achebe's claims contradicted those from the

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[166] This is circular too -- struggling to grasp something you already know.

text. His example of homosexuality did *not* explain the distinction; but rather affirmed it.
Moreover the content provided was itself fragmented and not clearly tied to the chapter's larger
claims and arguments about social experience or personality. This point emerges clearly when
comparing the lecture to the textbook. For instance textbook author John Macionis wrote:

"… John Watson developed a theory of behaviorism, which held that behavior is not
instinctive but learned. Thus people are everywhere human, differing only in their cultural
patterns. In short, Watson rooted human behavior not in nature but in nurture." (Macionis,
p. 73).

As we saw above, Achebe's interpretation in lecture began with a pithy sentence. -- "John
Watson talks about behavior." Perhaps it was too pithy. In so doing, Achebe not only skipped
an opportunity to talk in terms of intellectual history but also to distinguish between behavior
and behaviorism! He had first stipulated that behavior "is not instinctive", yet contradicted
himself (and the text) further on when he reminded the students they " … should also know that
there are certain things are instinctive, others also learned." And as plausible though this sounds,
it's *not* a point the textbook was trying to make. The gist of the textbook's message rested on
pointing out that behavior was *not* instinctive. It was *not* concerned to point out that some
behaviors are instinctive and others are learned!

And while Achebe noted, "… social scientists tend to caution that we should not dismiss or
disregard instinctiveness," he was contradicting what the textbook had been trying to
communicate. The textbook categorically stated that "[t]oday, social scientists are cautious
about describing *any* human behavior as instinctive." (Macionis, p. 73) (italics in the original).
Thus when trying to understand human behavior the text does *not* caution novices about the
dangers of overlooking instinct, to the contrary, it cautions them against employing instinct at
all!

Substituting the pedantic for the controversial

The textbook admits it is also impossible to deny the significance of biology, "human life
after all depends on a functioning body." Still perhaps the single most important, general idea to
appreciate in this chapter was the circumscribed role for biology in human development, a

biology delimited by socialization. Though your "potential" may be locked in your genes and biology, it is your *social experiences* that determine the degree to which they are unlocked, or as textbook stipulates, "whether you develop your potential depends on how you are raised" (Macionis, p. 73). Indeed the textbook is unequivocal on the relative importance of socialization and biology:

> "Without denying the importance of nature, then, nurture matters **more** in shaping behavior. More precisely, *nurture is our nature*." (Macionis, p. 73) Italics in the original; my bold (p. 73).

The willingness to skip over so counter-intuitive a concept and to bypass a phrase such as "nature is our nurture" is regrettable, but it is consistent with a commitment to the intuitive and common-sensical.

When Macionis stipulated that in "shaping behaviors" "nurture matters *more*", he was prepared to be controversial. Achebe seemingly was not. Instead Achebe suggested that between *nature* and *nurture* a "balance*"* needed to be struck. He mentioned no circumstances under which one was more important than the other. Certainly between extreme opinions, a *balanced* approach seems best; this was not however the textbook's point!

The relevance of Achebe's example of homosexuality also depended on this notion of balance. In light of so controversial a topic, one could imagine profound differences of opinion to be balanced. Indeed Achebe does not clearly distinguish homosexuality the behavior from homosexuality the controversy. He appears to deal with latter as if to settle the former. Thus, the wisdom of mediating between politicized opinions stands for understanding how to reconcile contrasting forces that shape human behavior. While the book offers a way to articulate these forces, Achebe's example sidesteps the matter entirely.

Ultimately, Achebe employed the controversial issue of homosexuality to underscore a non-controversial claim about the importance balance, sidestepping the more controversial, less intuitive notion of the relative *insignificance* of instincts. In a context of *learning how to behave,* of being implored to seek balance amidst such matters as homosexuality, when Achebe implored the students not to " … dismiss any of that other behaviors" (see above) it was likely understood

as a call for tolerance.[167]

In sum, I suggest Achebe's penchant for introducing the meaning of topics as intuitive and *already grasped* is consonant with his a willingness to replace the controversial with the pedantic.[168] In addition to the fact that important meanings from the textbook are omitted, what remains to be discussed is relatively common. Finally, this process of presenting commonplaces as knowledge is replete with ironies. Beyond presenting Darwin in a manner akin to popular misunderstanding of his theory, without the social science corrective, what remained of the social sciences in lecture was a brief mention of Watson. Essentially the textbook content was reduced to a call for a non-controversial ethical good (i.e. tolerance) in support of a relatively non-controversial discursive good (i.e. balance), such that the distinctive controversial, sociological perspective offered in the textbook appeared (e.g. Watson's contribution) is obstructed.

Studies of isolated children: Ideas skipped

The last topic in this section of the textbook was largely skipped in lecture. What remained of, *Studies of isolated children,* ended up in the opening vignette. Omitted was that the part of the topic that described sociology as an empirically based research tradition. And while much of this chapter argued for the significance of social experiences, by demonstrating how their absence has dramatic implications for human development, this omitted part had sought to *prove* it empirically. Towards this end two key lines of empirical evidence had been offered:

(1) laboratory experiments with monkeys and
(2) 'natural experiments' with socially isolated children (e.g. Anna and Genie)

Like the distinction between the *social* and the *biological* sciences, the one between *laboratory* and *natural* experiments was also omitted in lecture. No reference to experiments of any kind was made, and so the *ideas* of evidence and research were lost in the process. Also lost in this presentation was an appreciation of the developmental dimension of socialization – how in the absence of sufficient human contact, an individual's pathway to becoming fully human is

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[167] Though Aristotle did not use the term balance, his concept of the "golden mean" was also focused on virtues.
[168] The textbook is saying above, all do not forget that *all* behavior is learned, what instinct explains is that *that* we learn in the first place.

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blocked.

Thus, in a series of slides organized as a parade of 'facts' about great thinkers in Sociology and Psychology, much can fall out. I suggest that perhaps the significance of a sociological perspective itself may be lost. Moreover, I have argued that the difference between sociology in the textbook and sociology in the classroom, is knowing what difference sociology makes. Certainly knowing that sociological opinion is constructed from research, from the interaction of theory and evidence would have helped students appreciate the difference that sociology makes – indeed how sociological opinions are *made* differently than their own.

Finally, Achebe's approach to teaching introductory sociology ran a risk of running afoul of "discipline leaders'" goals for the course (Pfeiffer and Syed, 2007). It appears that both Macionis and sociology "leaders" agree that understanding the "social part of sociology", knowing the "difference between sociology and the other social sciences", and appreciating the "scientific nature of sociology" were critical components of the introductory sociology course (Pfeiffer and Syed, 2007). Yet from the very beginning of Achebe's lecture on *Social Experience*, it appeared as if these three themes would not represent the discipline in his account. Indeed they were elided from a chapter whose contents had been designed precisely to teach them.[169] In the next section, I shall explore the degree to which these dynamics continue to play out in Achebe's lecture in the next topic in the textbook, *Understanding Socialization*.

Understanding Socialization

Introductions dispensed with, the textbook moved to the second major topic, "Understanding Socialization." [170] In lecture this was represented as a jump to Freud. Yet

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[169] It is possible that Achebe's approach and lecture has other virtues. Some of which would likely be associated with the apparent inclusiveness and non-alienating aspect to the content he communicated. It is possible that he is communicating to the students that they already possess sociological knowledge and/or they are capable of acquiring sociological knowledge. My own analysis does not deny that this is possible, but it does suggest that the lost opportunity to learn the knowledge from the textbook is more important and has greater ramifications.

[170] It should be added that in actuality he had started to jump to Freud, but was interrupted by a student who wanted, "go back" to an earlier slide, then another set of students wanted to talk about the cases of the socially isolated children. Once this was finished (lasting maybe 3 minutes) Achebe returned to his lecture saying, "Jean Piaget talks about" PD 015 24; however the class in unison reminded him that we had not arrived at Piaget yet, "We are on Freud" [PD 015 251]. "Cheeky Boy" in fact helped him get back to the correct slide, "Keep going back, keep going back ... wait, stay here." PD 015 253].

according to the textbook the transition was a significant one. More than a simple move from one great thinker to another, the transition represented the reframing of social experience *as* socialization, and segueing into the body of the chapter -- an elaboration upon the concept of socialization. In the textbook, this new topic begins with a definition:

> "Socialization is a complex, life long process. The following sections highlight the work of six researchers who made lasting contributions to our understanding of *human development*." (Macionis, p. 74)

In lecture Freud appears as little more than theorist number three. However, Freud's connections to the major themes of the chapter were no more clearly delineated than they had been for the two thinkers who preceded him. There was nothing to suggest that Freud was qualitatively any more or less significant than Darwin or Watson. Yet the textbook's structure (evident in its hierarchy of headings) stipulated unequivocally that with respect to the overall argument of the chapter, Freud was *more* significant.[171] Specifically, he was pivotal to a story about how the social sciences came to understand the nature and significance of *social experience,* how such a perspective represented a conceptual revolution, and how it represented a turnabout in our image of behaviors as instinctually driven.

Elements of Personality

Mirroring the series of topics described in the textbook*,* Achebe's lecture slides transitioned to Freud:

> "Sigmund Freud, if you have done psychology, you know Sigmund Freud … Sigmund Freud talks about personality. How do we become who we are? Personality as the way it is defined; it is just the thinking and the acting and the feeling. If you don't act, people don't know who you are. And that`s why we say someone is outgoing. Because you have seen it! (he says emphatically as if to make a controversial point). You are acting

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[171] Information about Freud follows under a subtopic with his name in the heading. Darwin and Watson however appear as lower-level elementary topics within the argument. Their names are not even included in the headings of sections that describe them.

like that. Or someone is shouting. Yes, Yes he has a shy   personality, outgoing
personality.   You know. Because we see that (pause-- as he changes slides). You are a
people-person, we see that. You mix well, because we see you mixing well, with other
people. You're a good mixer. [PD: 015 232, 255]

Like *socialization* or *Charles Darwin*, introduced earlier in the lecture Achebe suggested
that portions of the class, Freud and his concepts are already known: "If you have done
Psychology" then "you know Sigmund Freud." I suggest that with so many students *already* in
the know, it was not necessary to engage the content too deeply. In addition, Professor Achebe
did not elaborate on why the discipline of sociology might be poaching from Psychology to
understand personality in the first place![172]   Again, such a detail would likely have been of
interest to those wanting to know what made the sociological perspective unique. Also like
Darwin, the degree to which Freud is already known, is more likely due to his significance
within popular culture than as an element of course content.

Similarly, Achebe described the concept of personality as essentially "*just* the thinking and
the acting and the feeling" – just that, no more, no less, suggesting that the concept of personality
was also something the students *already* understood. Again his distillation from the textbook was
perhaps too pithy. In the absence of elaboration, this representation was partial and fragmentary.
The textbook's own definition was less concerned with defining personality *per se,* than situating
it within a larger argument about the significance of social experience and its role in creating
individual personalities.

> "Unlike other species, whose behavior is biologically set, humans need social experience
> to learn their culture and to survive. Social experience is the also the basis of
> **personality**, *a person`s fairly consistent patterns of acting, thinking and felling*" [bold
> and italics in the original] (Macionis, p. 72)

Clearly Achebe had captured the definitional gist of "personality" from the textbook (i.e. the
italicized part), but in omitting everything else the concept lost much of its significance. Achebe

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[172] One could also add that the lecture describes how different disciplines could use same material
differently or how they might simply focus on different parts of a large corpus.

omitted the idea that personality itself emerges out of something more fundamental, subtle and difficult to comprehend -- *social experience,* the central topic of the chapter. Indeed, according to Achebe an adequate explanation would in fact have to await a full and deep reading of the whole chapter.

Ultimately, personality was described through a set of fragmented and *familiar* claims**.** For instance Achebe noted that, "[i]f you don't act, people don't know who you are." In the absence of any other theoretical context, such claims were likely interpreted as truisms. An equally clichéd notion followed as Achebe stipulated that people who are perceived as doers are likely to be labeled as "out-going. I suggest that, in and of itself, such a claim is likely too commonplace to have been inspiring. Furthermore, this relatively un-controversial notion of personality types as self-evident was elaborated upon still when he defined the "mixer." As if describing a difficult concept he asked the students to imagine an actual situation "You mix well, because we see you mixing well, with other people. You're a good mixer."[173] The complexity implied may have been related to Achebe's own sense that the example represented the power of social constructions or labeling theory. Yet such connections were certainly never made explicit, and unlikely to have been conveyed.

Finally, his descriptions were tinged with irony. While Achebe had implied that personality could easily be read-off a person`s behavior, the textbook to the contrary suggested (following Freud) that personality was much more opaque -- a product of unconscious forces. In addition, the relation of personality types to Freud's theories, or the significance of personality to our understanding of socialization was never made explicit.

The textbook's argument structure (manifest in its topic headings) provided the reader with a framework for understanding the different ideas at stake, along with their relative significances. *Sigmund Freud's Elements of Personality* was organized with the following textbook headings:

1. Understanding Socialization
      a. Sigmund Freud's Elements of Personality
            i. Basic Human Needs
            ii. Freud's Model of Personality

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[173] It is possible that he is articulating a version of labeling theory here, in which individuals become their label; however, if so, he is certainly not very explicit about it.

iii. Personality Development

The structure of headings outlined above, suggest that Freud's contributions are significant and complex. Yet there was little sign of such complexity (much less these topics) in lecture. In the sections that follow I shall dig further into to the topic of Freud, comparing his representations in lecture to his representation in the textbook

The Life and death and Instincts

Following the textbook still, the lecture moved to a discussion of Freud's *life* and *death instincts*. For the sake of clarity, I have divided this portion of the lecture into two sections. The following is the first section:

> "According to Sigmund Freud personality is shaped by two opposite forces. One is called the life instinct -- the desire to live, the desire to survive; you have seen people drowning, they fight. They know they are going to die, but they are fighting not to die. You see some people being attacked. They know they are overpowered, but they are going to struggle, to see if they can get themselves free. They are operating under the life instinct. They wish to survive. They wish to live. [PD: 015 257]

Filmic images of life and death struggles aside, Professor Achebe seemed to equate Freud`s very specific notion of a *life instinct,* with the much more commonplace idea of a *will to survive.* Yet the textbook stipulated that the life instinct was a "need for bonding" (Macionis, p. 74) – and *not* a survival instinct! Indeed those reading the textbook, this need for bonding would also have resonated with a discussion about monkeys earlier in the chapter.[174] Nonetheless my point is not simply to underscore that Professor Achebe wrongly cast the 'life instinct' as a 'will to survive." My point rather is that in this teaching and learning situation, the concept of a 'will to survive" is

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[174] Specifically, the section on research on monkeys that was omitted, had described monkeys who in the absence of flesh-and-blood mothers attached themselves to "artificial" ones made of cloth and wire. As noted above, this portion about research with monkeys was not part of the Professor Achebe's lecture. It is possible, that had the concept of "social experiences" been elevated to the status of an integral and integrating concept for this lecture, a context for understanding the significance of some of these otherwise familiar concepts would have been provided as well as a principle with which the addition and subtraction of material could have been based.

not only wrong, but once again clichéd, and by being clichéd implies that sociology offers no special perspective on the world.

Still following the textbook, the lecture moved on to a discussion of Freud's *death instinct.* Achebe continued,

> Whereas the other one is called the death instinct. Sometimes I tell my students, yes, let alone their aggressiveness, even when we just say I wish I were dead. You are operating under the death instinct. According to Sigmund Freud. 'I wish so and so was dead, yeah! That's what it is driving you to that. But when your aggressiveness, whatever it is, when you take those pills and commit suicide, yes! You are being driven by the death instinct. Ok? [PD: 015 257]

Here too was another set of confused commonplaces. If, according to Achebe, the life instinct was a will to survive than logically, a death instinct was a *will to death.* Yet the textbook never suggested anything so mortal or dramatic, insisting instead that the "death instinct" was more akin to an "aggressive drive." However, a 'will to death' helps us to understand the examples Achebe offered his students. His examples were decidedly more tragic and self-inflicted, referring for instance to "commit(ing) suicide", "taking those pills" or "wish(ing) you (were) dead." He would end up claiming that Freud's instinct referred to *both* wishing yourself dead and to wishing others dead (e.g. "I wish so and so was dead"). This representation of Freud is confused. And again we see commonsense notions, manipulated logically and leading to lax and confused conceptualizations.

The textbook offered a different image. It made no ethical claims, nor sought to persuade through pathos. Macionis (following Freud) called the life instinct "*Eros"* and said it referred to a "need for bonding." The death instinct on the other hand was referred to by the Greek word for death, Thanatos. A noteworthy irony here was that by reaching back to the Greeks, Freud had sought terms to represent unique and universal forces he felt could not adequately be comprehended in common everyday German vernacular.

Achebe's use of the vernacular, with the lax phrasing it entails, led him to lose sight of the universality of these two archetypal forces. For instance, at one point in lecture he suggested that the death instinct was a passion *some* of us had better be rid of. However Macionis was quick to

note that "a death instinct" was an impulse "we *all* share", that both life and death instincts are in fact universal "drives" (p. 74), or what Freud called "basic human needs." Moreover these drives are "… opposing forces, operating at an unconscious level, [that] create deep inner tension." Freud's drives (according to Macionis) represented a fundamental and *submerged* dynamic of life. Yet Achebe had implored his students to "let alone their aggressiveness. " From the perspective of the textbook such a call makes no sense. It would be no wiser for a student to give up either drive ("bonding" or "aggression") than it would to choose between cerebral hemispheres!   And like his call for tolerance with respect to homosexuality, in the face of suicide and homicide he called for equanimity and level-headedness. Consequently, should his claims about either personality or Freud have appeared epistemologically weak, the supporting examples he provided were morally unassailable.

Freud, Biology and Sociology

Perhaps not so obvious from the lecture, but Freud's theories were part of the textbook's argument for the limitations of instincts. Macionis wrote,

> "Freud claimed that biology plays a major part in human development, although *not* in terms of specific instincts, as is the case in other species. Rather, he theorized that humans have two basic needs or drives that are present at birth."[my emphasis] (Macionis, p. 74)

For Freud, *human* instincts are not like *animal* instincts. Animal instincts are "specific" (Macionis, p.73) while human ones refer to something decidedly more "general" and miscellaneous –general, in that they can only defined by a broad bonding-aggression dynamic; miscellaneous, in that the ramifications of this interaction are endless. And though the dynamic itself might be biologically hardwired, what these drives *mean* for an actual person is what determines how they act, and *those* meanings themselves are a *social* matter.

Of course the significance of the "social" is a theme that not only runs through this chapter, but through the entire textbook (if not a good portion of the field). Moreover, sociology educators/writers in general will often define the "social" by delimiting the role biology is

assumed to play in making us human.[175] For example Bruce's (1999) <u>Sociology -- A Very Short</u>
<u>Introduction</u>, itself a popular effort to introduce Sociology to lay readers, does not draw upon
Freud to make his point, yet seeks to demonstrate the limitations of biology and instincts. In
doing so, Bruce notes that it is precisely concepts like a "will to live" etc. that are very
problematic from a sociological perspective:

> "An easy way to dismiss the more extreme forms of biological determinism is to point to
> the many ways we deliberately reject instincts. There may be a *will to live* but we can
> commit suicide. There may be a will to reproduce, but women can chose not to have
> children and still live apparently fulfilled lives. There may be a sex urge, but celibacy is
> possible." (Bruce, 1999 p. 19)[176] [my italics].

Bruce used a *will to survive* to illustrate the limitations of instincts for understanding human
behavior, while Achebe appeared to use it to understand behavior. And if Macionis looked to
evidence from Monkey's make his argument, Bruce used fish to make his!

> "Salmon do not consider where might it be nice to reproduce; they automatically return to
> spawn where they spawned before. In contrast, humans derive very little direction from
> their biology, which creates difficulties …" (Bruce, 1999 p. 19).

I am suggesting there might not only be common ways of describing "the social" and of proving
the limitations of instincts, there might also be common ways of failing to do so! Hence the
difference between successfully and unsuccessfully describing the role of instincts (from a
sociological perspective) is the difference between departing from and re-affirming common
sense (see Analysis section below). Perhaps it is more than just irony that relates Bruce's (1999)
intentional use of a "will to survive" (or to reproduce) for showing the limits of Biology for
understanding our humanity, and Achebe's use of the concept to unintentionally underscore
biology's significance.

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[175] Indeed this is one way to describe the significance of a sociological perspective.
[176] Unlike a Gould or a Dawkins, Bruce (like Macionis) is trying to introduce a discipline --they are both
seeking to initiate sociology novices.

Thus, Achebe's reproduction of Freud has begun to mislead the students as to what Macionis (and quite likely) Freud had originally meant. In what follows below I continue to examine the textbook, and the *reproduction*-quality of his lectures. Eventually I will suggest that the quality of these reproductions can be identified with the quality of Achebe's approach to learning the textbook, itself a likely indirect influence on the quality of a student's experience with learning the textbook.

Freud's Model of Personality

Moving on in textbook and lecture Achebe arrived at Freud's famous model of personality:

> " Sigmund Freud talks about three basic parts to the personality. There is the id, which is the human basic instincts, aggressiveness, reproduction and survival, that's what the id is all about. The Id wants to reproduce. The id wants to survive. So when you see people who are, who go out stealing in order to have food, to eat, they are just being driven by the id. They don't have a job. They don't have an income and therefore they have to steal in order to survive. When you see people going out to kill, they do their killing in order to have certain things that other people have that they don't have. That's just to have some of the commodities, or the commodities of wealth, or the material goods some people have. [PD: 015 259]

Beyond conflating, stealing and killing this portrayal of the id, it confused many of the elements presented in the textbook. Achebe described the id as the domain of the instinctual and a source of human agency. He represented the id as if it had a mind of its own, a sort of homunculus for understanding the personality system: the *id* part was that part of the personality that wanted to survive and to reproduce. In addition to identifying the id with the instinctual, Achebe identified it with evil and/or selfish acts that *some* are prepared to do. He also failed to clearly distinguish efforts *to survive* with efforts to get rich. And while there might indeed be sociobiological explanations that connect amassing *wealth* with reproductive success, none were provided in this lecture.

The textbook by contrast offered a decidedly more nuanced interpretation. According to

Macionis, the id does *not* have a mind of its own (so to speak), the id "(Latin for 'it') represents a *human being's basic drives*, which are unconscious and demand immediate satisfaction" (Macionis, p. 74) (emphasis in the original)-- something radically inaccessible, inhuman and *it-like* that is being suggested. Yet in lecture, Freud's *basic needs* was reduced to a more crass (if perhaps more accessible) notion *of doing of whatever one wants*. Achebe enlivened these concepts further still with examples:

> "Reproduction, when people go out raping.[177] Yes, they have that kind of, 'Hey, I just want go sowing my seeds, with anything and so forth (he knocks down on the table for emphasis). That is the id. The ego does a *balancing act*, because the ego is trying to balance both what the id is giving the pleasure, you're going to get. The id is telling you, ah this thing is so good." [PD: 015 261] [my italics]

Unlike the textbook, Achebe described the id with reference to deviant and criminal behavior. In addition, he hinted to no layers of subtlety in interpretation that would be conferred in upcoming chapters on deviance and sexuality. And contrary to Bruce's (1999) example of spawning salmon (see above) Achebe's example associating reproduction and rape at the very least ran a risk of conflating reproduction with aggression, if not desire with need. I suggest that ultimately such examples do not help students to distinguish between the forces of biology and society on an individual either, itself a cardinal goal of this chapter if not the field.[178]

Before continuing with Achebe's discussion of the ego, I present the textbook's efforts to distinguish between it and the id. About the id Macionis wrote,

> "Rooted in biology, the id is present at birth, making a *newborn* a bundle of demands for attention, touching and food; But society opposes the self-centered id, which is why one of

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[177] It is difficult to know how to parse this. Here is a presumably deviant behavior articulated within the same sort of rhetorical pattern used for describing a pastime or hobby. Ideally, sociology students would have a set of distinctions at their disposal with which they could begin interrogating such things themselves.

[178] Again the discussion has strayed into a moral zone. However this time, right and wrong are conspicuously at stake. Moreover, in the "sexuality" chapter, under the heading of "sexual violence", Macionis tries to make sure his reader does *not* assume that rape represents a desire for sex. Macionis writes, "Although some people think rape is motivated only by a desire, it is actually an expression of power, a violent act that uses sex to hurt, humiliate or control another person" (p. 163) This distinction is not apparent in Achebe's discussion.

the first words a child usually learns is "no." [my emphasis]

And with respect to the ego Macionis wrote:

> "To avoid frustration, a child must learn to approach the world realistically. This is done through the **ego** (Latin for "I"), which is a *person`s conscious efforts to balance innate pleasure-seeking drives with the demands of society.* The ego arises as we gain awareness of our distinct existence and face the fact that we cannot have everything we want" (Macionis, p. 74) [bold and emphasis in the original]

Thus, *only* the youngest of newborns can be pure *id*, so to speak -- bundles of desire demanding immediate satisfaction. To understand the behavior of persons other than newborns one must understand the degree to which their ego and super-ego have developed since then. Yet Achebe discussed young adults as if driven by their ids alone. It seems even the *sowing of seeds* to which Achebe referred cannot simply be reduced to matters of the id and *innate pleasure-seeking drives*. Indeed, ceding conceptual ground to instincts and id was precisely what the textbook sought to combat in the first place. And while Achebe introduced the ego and thus implicated Freud's theory in his lecture, it was not however implicated in his stark examples.

On Freud's model, understanding the behavior of developing humans depends on understanding the interactions among id, ego and super-ego! The super-ego is our "conscience" -- an "internalized set of cultural values and norms responsible for "telling us *why* we cannot have everything we want" *emphasis in the original* (Macionis, p. 74). Ultimately normal personality and normal behavior emerge from learning to approach the world realistically -- the product of a developing ego and its capacity to "consciously" manage the conflicting desires of an "unconscious" id with the "demands of society" embodied in a developing super-ego. This is essentially a model of how social experiences determine personality -- they do so very early in the life course and via a socio-historically contingent ego!

While Macionis describes the ego as, a "*person's conscious efforts to balance innate pleasure-seeking drives with the demands of society"* (p. 73 italics in original, my underlining), like his choice of *life-long* earlier, Achebe's choice to elaborate upon the word "balance" is similarly interesting. Thus, in lecture the ego was identified with the more vernacular phrase,

"balancing-act" (See above--[PD: 015 261]).   In order to clarify what he meant by "balancing-act", he drew upon an example of "drug use" that he had used previously:

"So to go back to last week, when we talked about FLYING [*he smiles a broad toothy smile, fluttering his hands to the sides of his chest -- flying is code in the class for taking drugs -- the class giggles at the choice of example and the seemingly unselfconscious if not absurd way he characterizes it (---from field notes*)]. The id is telling you that when you get this thing you FLY so nicely. But the ego tells you, yes, although I know that you enjoy flying, but let me see what the super-ego is talking about. The culture does not condone people who are on heroin, drugs, whatever it is and so forth. We don't want that (long pause). So the ego is doing the *balancing act*. Tells the id, I know you enjoy doing A, B, C, D, but let me check the other side to make sure the way is clear, before you go ahead and steal or commit this crime. [PD: 015 263]

A student interjects and asks for clarification on the superego, Achebe responded:

"The super-ego? The culture in you, your culture (pause). So if you have internalized your culture and it tells you stealing is wrong, killing is wrong, telling a lie is wrong, but the id tells you, you can lie; in this case, you can just lie. The ego will tell you, no, no, no. You go back to what the bible tells you about -- Is lying ok? If you have internalized your culture you know that lying is not right. And you don't lie. But if you have not internalized your culture, to the extent that you don't care what happens in your culture. This is why people when, you know you are told don't drive under the influence of alcohol some people know that its wrong, but they continue to do it. Yes. The id is telling you, drive! Nothing is going to happen to you, but the ego tells you hey, the police will be there to arrest you. You can go to jail. Your license can be taken away. Whatever it is; you can kill some people and so forth. Ah, forget about it. It means you have not even internalized your culture, therefore you are more likely to be driven by the id, than controlled by the super-ego (long pause) [PD 15 263-268].

While drug use in US society seems plausibly (if delicately) situated between pleasure seeking

impulses and social attitudes, after the student's question the matter became decidedly more muddled. The theoretical aspect of Achebe's answer, where he describes the super ego as the "culture in you" seemed to achieve some measure of departure from common sense. Nonetheless as he sought concrete elaborations of what he had in mind, this departure appeared to fade and ultimately he seemed to conflate pleasure seeking, conflict avoidance, impulsiveness and deviance all together.

It is worth noting that Achebe represented Freud's model as akin to an internal dialogue, with the id represented by a voice *telling* you to do something, and the ego by another voice *telling* you not to do it.   It seems that this rhetorical strategy can also muddle the matter.   At the very least, it became easy for professor Achebe to portray the id, as a site both for desires and for reflection on those desires (e.g. The id is telling you, *Drive! Nothing is going to happen to you*" (my italics). Even if the first part of this impulse refers to id forces, the second, self-reflexive part, is an ego function -- the reality framing mediation between id and super-ego. Finally, the choice of "driving under the influence", in the absence of further qualification, does not appear to be qualify as the kind innate pleasure seeking drive Macionis and Freud were referring to.[179]

In the final analysis, Achebe's lecture on Freud appeared to turn the textbook on its head. What in the textbook was a personality determining process (with a special emphasis on childhood), in lecture became a behavior determining process with a special emphasis on young adulthood. A final irony here is that the rhetorical from of an internal dialogue itself likely emerges from a tradition of speaking and thinking about the world that has its origins in Freud's theories; however, it appears as if Achebe might not have used the internal dialogue so as to capture exactly what Freud meant.

In summary

We see that many elements from the textbook's account of Freud's model of personality are found in Achebe's lecture (e.g. the internalizing of culture, the balancing of id and super-ego); yet in reproducing the textbook, some of the significant meanings associated with these concepts are missing. Conducting the lecture in an academic register appeared to have been

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[179] All of the quoted items in the following couple of paragraphs direct quotations from page 74 of the Macionis, textbook. I have used so many of the key words and expressions from this page so that the reader can appreciate the similarities and differences between the ideas employed in the text and those employed in class.

eschewed for something decidedly more vernacular and jocular. At the very least, this approach to lecturing led to confused and contradictory statements—arguments that were self-contradictory and that contradicted the textbook. An important example of which was Achebe's claim that social scientists urge "caution … that we should not dismiss or disregard instinctiveness." However according to the textbook, social scientists have urged the exact opposite, that we should not in fact *overestimate* the importance instincts!

Freud was the first of 6 six theorists in the textbook dedicated to helping the reader *understand* the topic of *socialization.* Rhetorically, Freud was to have introduced the concept of human development, then demonstrate his own "special importance to sociology", by helping *us* to recognize that "that we internalize social norms and that childhood experiences have a lasting impact on personality" (Macionis, p. 75). It was a revolutionary idea, with subtle implications still. Achebe's use of Freud in lecture likely not did convey his significance. Moreover, we see that in spite of a concerted effort to simulate if not mirror the textbook; sociologically significant themes tended to get lost in the translation to slides and lectures. In the next section I show how Sanders own efforts to reproduce the textbook betrays a curiously similar tendency to skip the more sociologically significant themes.

Professor Sanders' Representation of Chapter 3

As we noted above, the chapter on "socialization" (Chapter 3) contained a significant section composed of "six researchers who made lasting contributions to our understanding of human development." (p.74) The six theorists and their corresponding sub-headings appeared in the following order within the textbook:

(1) Sigmund Freud's Elements of Personality
(2) Jean Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development
(3) Lawrence Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development
(4) Carol Gilligan's Theory of Gender and Moral Development
(5) George Herbert Mead's Theory of the Social Self
(6) Erik Erikson's Eight Stages of Development

While I examined Achebe's presentation of Freud from this section of theorists, in what I follows I examine Sanders' treatment of George Herbert Meade from this same section. Afterwards, I examine Sanders treatment of the third major section of the chapter, *Agents of Socialization*.

George Herbert Mead

Only George Herbert Mead's theories have been associated with the discipline of Sociology specifically. They are arguably the most difficult to grasp and represent the greatest departure from common sense. In point of fact he is the only one of the six theorists to offer a mechanism for the capacity of social experience to produce selves. Indeed, the textbook devotes slightly more space to him than to any of the others.[180] The portion of Professor Sanders lecture devoted to Mead is quoted below in its entirety. The words and phrases I have underlined are either Sanders' exact quotations from the textbook or obvious paraphrases of it.[181]

001 "Then we come to another man, one of those sociological saints (some laughter).

002 George Meade has the audacity to say (unlike a Freud or a Piaget) he says who you are, is a totally social development (pause).

003 Forget the Biology!

004 Who you are is a social phenomenon and he talks about it, starting here with *"The self"*.

005 It is a product of *social experience*.

006 Um, and again, it goes on to say how different that is, you know,

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[180] In light of the significance of Mead's theory for Sociology, and its difficulty to grasp, he gets conspicuously little treatment by all the instructors I observed. They all focused considerably for time on Erik Erikson's model that had the benefit of offering a number of stages to discuss and were relatively straightforward.

[181] In the section that follows I have employed line numbers in the hope that it in turn makes the analysis easier to follow.

007 That is some of the audacious claim of, that uh, you are what *Sociology makes you!*

008 And that's outlined there.

009 *I hope you get it down*!

010 It's a, it's a *great* approach um, I think, in explaining, why we're here and who we are (clapping). And how we become aware of who we are.

011 Looking down at the bottom of the page: "the development of the self"!

012 The key to developing a self is learning to be able to take the role of another. Hmm! (pause)

013 You know, there are many theories on, on how people succeed.

014 And one theory says that it is the ability to, for a person to, be able to stand in the, sort of the eyes, in the shoes of another person, *and see oneself*,

015 not to be so ego-centric as to think the world revolves around ourselves,

016 but be able to go out and look back and see ourselves through the eyes of another.

017 Mead said, this is really the *clue,* to figuring out who we are,

018 and, and, to, to, grow into that, into a, (pause) personality people.

019 Talks about significant *others* ! (clapping hands) and, um , you know, how, how they have special importance for *us,*

020 and how uh, <u>gradually children learn to take on the roles of *others,*</u> and ones,

021 how, um, and, and how indeed we grow from, to a very <u>simple</u> game of <u>playing catch</u>.

022 Have you ever played catch with a three year old? or whatever?

023 You know, you know, they can do pretty well at that.

024 But don't try to play <u>baseball</u> with them. Because that's just such <u>a *complex* game</u>.

025 Um, anybody who has ever played <u>baseball</u> or softball, um, I think, maybe you know it is one of the most complex games <u>imaginable</u>. The Yale president, Bartlet Giammatti, gave up in effect, his presidency of *Yale,* alright, one of the most significant institutions of higher education in our country, gave it up to become, to become what? Anybody remember? Anybody know anything about Bartlett Giamatti? He's now dead, but not that long ago. He gave that up to *become* (dramatic pause). The commissioner of baseball. Because he really had a *belief*, that this was one of the most complex games *going*, and he wrote a book about it, (there is some rumbling now amongst the students) in which he explained a lot about, uh, what he saw in this, and uh, you know (clapping). And that's something that comes with growing up, (pause) the <u>ability</u> to play these complex, these very <u>complex games</u> (3:52)

While this particular excerpt does not contain direct quotations, Professor Sanders' frequent use of terms and phrases drawn from the textbook attests to his efforts to follow it faithfully. Moreover, he has discovered the significance of Meade' through-going sociological interpretation of the self {004} that dispenses entirely with biology {003}. Yet in a likely effort to convey the concept's relevance, Sanders stipulated that the theory promised to explain, "who *you* are" {004}. I suggest this is claims is just as much a cavalier overreach for the theory as it is ambiguous. If in light of the textbook both instructors made confusing and ambiguous claims, Achebe's could be jocular and commonplace, while Sanders' could be cavalier and overblown.

Ambiguous Terms

Imprecision in terms is uncharacteristic in an academic register (Schleppegrell, 1994). Nonetheless, in describing Mead's theory for his students he claimed that theory's beauty was that it explained "who you are." However, 'this claim may have referred to one or more of the following vaguely related notions he also stipulated:

1. "who you are is totally a *social development*" {002}
2. "who you are is a *social phenomenon*", {004} and
3. "you are what *Sociology* makes you" {007)

These examples represent a loose use of terms, conflating social development, social phenomenon, and Sociology. For instance, the last example conflated the social dimension with the discipline that studies it. Together they reflect a creatively imprecise use of the vernacular that is insufficiently analytic for a *disciplined* appreciation of the social. Though not articulated very clearly, we can deduce from the narrative above that one's 'socialness', can be understood via the concept of "the self", which is itself "a product of social experiences" {005}.

Following Mead (and following the textbook) Sanders suggested that "Biology" did *not* play a role in *who we are* -- stipulating that Mead's theory represented an "audacious" departure from common sense {002, 006, 007} (NB the numbers refer to specific lines of text above).[182] Although Sanders did not delve into what made Mead's claim so audacious, nor did he explain how selves could be entirely social, he nonetheless endorsed the perspective {010}. He also seemed to be aware that he would not be able to cover Mead's theory in its entirety that the students were not to rely on his lecture alone but should return to their textbooks to master the concepts for themselves. Thus, following his introductory blurb Sanders implored the students, "I hope you get it down!" {009}. However as imperatives, such hopes seem weak, and their pedagogical implications beyond reproduction or memorization, vague.

'Playing-catch'

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[182] It might worth recalling that it was so audacious that Achebe shied away from underscoring it when he had an opportunity, suggesting that some things are learned *and* some things are instinctual.

Sanders' own claim notwithstanding, Mead's theory was not likely experienced as audacious by the students. As lecture, Mead's theory reduced to a more commonplace notion that the *essence* of people was their 'selves', employing a notion of *self* largely indistinguishable from a common sense understanding of the term. To suggest that the self *develops* and that it entails a *social* dimension, in the absence of any further qualification likely affirms an uncontroversial notion that individuals *mature* in society.

We can deduce from Sander's lecture that this social dimension was related to the claim that, "The key to developing a self is learning to be able to take the role of another" {012}. However, in the absence of an obvious connection between *taking the role of another* and a *developing self*, the claim remains unsubstantiated and largely incomprehensible.   Yet Sanders did try to clarify his meaning by using the popular expression of "stand[ing] in … the *shoes* of another person, and see[ing] oneself" {014). And like Achebe's use of the phrase "balancing-act" above, faced with an overlap between an academic set of meanings on the one hand and a popular-culture set on the other, Sanders also appeared to adopt the later. He departed from the textbook and began to identify Mead's very specific theory of *the self* with more general theories of *personal success* {013, 014}. Reminiscent of Achebe's own flight into prescription and call for tolerance, Sanders ultimately conflated a theory of how the self is formed with an injunction not to be self-centered!

Nevertheless, he described a process of self-formation that depended on "significant others" – itself a vital term from Mead's theory (and the textbook). However in the absence of sufficiently elaboration (and without additional meanings from the textbook) "significant others" understandably was reduced to those who simply "have special importance for us" {019}. Again, we can deduce from Sanders' lecture that this process was identified with children *gradually learning to take on the roles of others* [020]. Also, the absence of additional information made Sanders appear as if reiterating that empathy for children originated from the *significant* adults in a child's life. Whatever students made of Mead's model, it was likely related to common and vague images of individuals maturing in society. Finally, a sign that all was not well with this representation of the textbook was signaled by the fact that what in the textbook had been a process of self-formation, Sander's described as if a process of *self-effacement*!

Ultimately, Sanders' presentation confused how one becomes a person with how one becomes a better person. Neither Mead's nor Macionis's point was to offer a recipe for empathy with other selves –to *stand in the shoes of another*. Rather, they sought to explain how only by taking the role of another do selves develop in the first place! Macionis in particular had written, "Mead's … point is that by taking the role of *the* other, we become *self*-aware" (p. 77) (my italics. Yet Sanders' account reduced to a more popular notion that by taking the role of *another* one becomes *more* aware. The distinctions can be subtle, but the implications large. Sanders' misses the self-other distinction at the heart of Mead's theory for the sake of a relatively clichéd point.

I take Achebe's miss-characterization of Freud to be similar to Sanders' miss-representation Mead. Both instructors seemed reluctant to dwell on their theory's universalist implications and demonstrated a tendency rather for elaborating on them as if they applied to some people some of the time. For instance, Sander's presented Mead as if he had relevance for those seeking personal success. Yet the theory focused exclusively on how selves emerge among *interacting* individuals in society. The theory was to have had ontological implications for all. Mead's theory is rich in implications and Sanders does indeed alert us to this possibility {010}. Of course, it is one thing to say that social experience makes selves {005} it is quite another to show how! Mead's theory actually endeavors to show *how*. In doing so he also offers important clues to understanding the *non-* human like quality of socially isolated children that had begun the chapter.

To make this process of a developing self more clear, Mead described it as a series of steps reflected in the developing character of children's play. Thus following Macionis (and Mead), Sanders likened the development of the self to "grow[ing] from, to a very simple game of playing catch" {021}. However, unable (or uninterested) in describing how Mead modeled the growth of a self upon "play" Sanders elaborated instead upon "playing-catch", adding his own historical side note for further clarification.

Turning to the students Sanders asked, "[h]ave you ever played catch with a three year old?"{022} He suggested that while the students might succeed at playing catch with little children he warned, "don't try to play baseball with them!" {24} Baseball he argued was too complex for small children. The analogy, "playing catch" is to "simple", {21} as playing baseball, is too "complex" {24}-- is certainly relevant to Mead's theory, yet *how* it is relevant is

not illustrated in the example. Thus the development of the topic of self appeared to slide into a self-help discussion, of becoming personally more successful {013}. Mead's concern for "play" Sanders translated into "playing catch", which could in turn be logically extended to baseball, the sociological relevance of which however was never firmly established.

The matter likely became more muddled still when Sanders extended baseball to the "commissioner of baseball", departing even further from the textbook. Specifically, Sanders presented the case of Bartlett Giamatti. The anecdote was likely an effort to underscore the complexity of baseball; however, it came just after a discussion of theories of success {013}. Consequently, as a former President of Yale, commissioner of baseball and celebrated author, Giamatti would likely have been taken as an exemplar of success.[183] Indeed numerous biographical details were offered about Bartlett Giamatti, with a reference to "complex games" coming only at the very end {027}.

In addition, many students were likely to have been confused as to whether the focus on "play" was off topic -- whether it was about selves, baseball or success. Given Sanders complex and far-reaching teaching agenda (Chapter 4) and without the analytic precision of an academic register, the Giamatti anecdote likely referred to all three at once. Nevertheless, I suggest that newcomers to sociology would ultimately have been hard pressed to see a significant difference between Mead's sociological view of the self, and the arguably more psychological view of the self they had upon entering the course.

Agents of Socialization

Having finished Mead, Sanders moved to Erik Erikson's 'Eight stages of Development.' Although a much more intuitive topic, he spent considerably more time here than he did with Mead[184]. He endorsed Erikson's theoretical perspective, commenting, "[t]his is a pretty good outline of the stages we tend to go through in life." The textbook then transitioned from the section on "Understanding Socialization", to one entitled, "Agents of Socialization." Here again we see further evidence that all of these sections and their constitutive topics are efforts to

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[183] In light of Sanders interest in inspiring his students beyond the course, his use of Giamatti was probably meant to showcase both an exemplary life, and the complexity of the sport.
[184] That was true in the case of all three instructors.

elaborate upon the significance of social experience.[185] The new topic was introduced as follows:

> "Every *social experience* we have affects us in at least a small way. However, several familiar settings have special importance to the socialization process. Among them are the family, the school, the peer group, and the mass media." (Macionis, 2009, p.79) [my italics]

Similarly, Sanders' lecture also transitioned to the new content, though he made no reference to the term 'agent of socialization' when he covered the information in this section. Moreover, while the textbook presented these "agents": the family, the school, the peer group and the mass media, as a *finite* set of key "familiar settings", Sanders presented them as "variables" {001}, drawn presumably from an infinite set. His lecture on 'agents of socialization' began as follows.[186]Again the underlined portions were elements that were almost direct quotations from the textbook.

001   "Now, there are, you know, conditions here and possibilities. And we'll look at some of those *variables*, that can change, in a bit ... they are kind of developed a bit more down here.

002   You work through it; you get into the; they talk about the <u>family</u>. They talk about <u>nurture</u> and <u>early childhood</u> on page 79. You know how <u>children learn from the types of environments that adults create</u>, and into that environment they learn to see.

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[185] I point out the references to "social experience" in the textbook to underscore the concept's significance for the chapter, and in doing so, underscore its conspicuous irrelevance for both Sanders and Achebe's lectures.

[186] Again, the parts underlined are taken directly from the text. The quoted portion is mostly a unitary portion of the lecture, except between lines 008 and 009. Between the two an anecdote was recounted. However, after it was completed the lecture returned to agents of socialization resuming with 'the peer group'. The entire section is located at PD 038-040 then skips PD 038-040 052 for line 009].

003   That's kind of a summary of what was, what <u>Erikson</u> was saying. That <u>they learn to see themselves as being strong or weak, smart or stupid, loved or just being kind of, uh, tolerated.</u> And then they'll. And all that helps with <u>trustworthy or dangerous</u>. …

004   And you know again, this is Mead, George Mead --we are conditioned by our society, (pause) that *makes us* who we are.

005   There are other *variables* that can impact that too on page 80, you know; *<u>race</u>* and *<u>class</u>*, you know, those … those things, you know … have a *variation* here as well.

006   <u>Social Class</u>. If … people, you know, who were born with much *money*, perhaps, they are going to have, give their children more opportunity.

007   And it talks here about how uh, people coming perhaps out of a working class background, uh, maybe they, they, they uh, they tend to bring their children up differently, they, they, uh have a perhaps a much stronger kind of *<u>obedience</u>*, um, as opposed to people who are more affluent, or perhaps <u>more educated</u> and they tend to take more of a psychological kind of approach to that as well.

008   So, you know here are the *variables* that can shape those various stages, race, class, schooling ...

009   <u>… The peer group</u>. All these *variables*, helping to shape us, when we get into school we start to run into the peer group.

In a section of lecture where, like many others, with excerpts (or near excerpts) from the textbook, it is surprising when key meanings are not represented.

   Sanders lecture suggested that there were "conditions" and "possibilities" {001} that the chapter's six researchers had failed to appreciate. He appeared to read Mead, Erikson and the

others as *general* theories of individual personality formation. As a result, his lecture often emphasized how these researchers could not possibly have told the *whole* story! In light of the patent inequality and heterogeneity (i.e. variation) among individuals in society, such general processes are necessarily inflected by other "variables." As plausible (if not commonsensical) as this seems, it was *not* a narrative from the textbook. Again, Macionis' narrative did not describe how any one individual person came to be who they are, it was rather a more abstract story about the significance of social experiences in the lives of individuals.

Agents of socialization are the *most* important domains of social experience in the development of individual personalities. Thus the textbook sought to do considerably more than just remind readers *that* families and/or schools are important. It wanted readers to ponder *why* families? *why* schools? What makes them special? Indeed many things have profound effects on individual lives: travel, hobbies, parents occupations etc. Yet Macionis sought to show how, from a sociological perspective, not all domains of experience (or variables in Sanders parlance) are created equal. 'Agents of socialization' in particular are *most* important. They are unique 'things' in the world that take active roles in *socialization* processes. Indeed, these "variables" as Sanders calls them are not as he suggests, mere factors in an individual's life. *They are specific critical forces in socialization processes.* Next I examine each agent of socialization discussed in the textbook and discuss how it was reproduced in lecture.

The Family

Large portions of Sanders' discussion of the family were quoted verbatim from the textbook {002-005}. However, he did *not* seem to reproduce the author's intentions. According to Macionis the family (like *agents of socialization* in general) demands special emphasis. It however is *the* "most important socialization agent of all." (p. 79). Before a child has reached the age of schooling, it is the family that has "the job of teaching skills values and beliefs." (p. 79) Macionis also noted that "[n]ot all family learning results from intentional teaching by parents"(p. 79)). Instead the family is a special place of *informal* learning that emerges in the "type of environment that adults create." It is within this nurturing context that a child learns to see himself or herself as "strong or weak, smart or stupid etc." (p. 79).

Part of the family's special influence lies in the fact that it " … *gives* children a social identity." (p. 79) [my italics] and is the site of where they obtain their social class. In point of

fact, whole chapters will be devoted to such complex topics later in the textbook, and are only introduced here in light of the critical role they play in defining early childhood experiences and "shaping … personality". (p. 80).[187] According to the textbook, the power of the family lies in the fact that, "[c]onsciously or not, all parents act in ways that encourage their children to follow in their footsteps" (p. 80).

Sanders recapped the textbook's discussion of 'the family' stipulating that much of it was already covered by Erikson [003][188]; yet no mention of the concept of 'agent of socialization' was made, and an opportunity to extend a commonsensical definition of the family in a more sociological direction was missed!

Schooling. Similarly, the significance of *schooling* as an agent of socialization was also lost in this lecture. Sanders' (mirroring the textbook) moved to what he called the schooling "variable" {008}, again highlighting some of the textbook's content and omitting others. The following is the portion of his lecture devoted to schooling.

010   "Well, we learn a lot more than the ABC's.

011   We are learning how to follow: we have to be there at a certain hour; we have

          lunch at a certain hour; we have recess at a certain hour, we, uh, and we get out of

          school at a certain hour.

012   In other words, we are learning structure -- Just the kind of structure that people

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[187] For example, the textbook cites a study of Americans parents who were asked to pick from a list of traits, those they found most desirable in a child:

" [T]hose with lower class standing favored obedience and conformity. Well-to do people by contrast, chose good judgment and creativity" (p. 80)

The textbook goes on to describe research that explained these differences of beliefs with respect to social class. It argued that people of "lower social standing" tended to have only limited education and to hold "jobs that involve routine tasks under close supervision. " These parents in turn expected that their children would ultimately take similar positions and so they encouraged obedience (sometimes physically). On the other hand, the exact opposite was true for "well-off" parents, who instead have jobs that demand "imagination and creativity"(p.80).   These parents in turn tried to inspire those same traits in their own children.

[188] Sanders suggesting that the details concerning 'the family' were already covered in the class' discussion on Erikson, seems similar to Achebe's introduction of some concepts as already encountered and understood. Both seem to mark instances when more subtle information from the textbook is not going to be reproduced.

will need when they go to work.

013   So there's, you know, there's all kind of socialization taking place in uh school, beyond reading, writing and, arithmetic.

014   And they say, its sort of like a <u>hidden curriculum</u>, um, and unfortunately, um, it, it, that curriculum can kind of <u>divide</u> us, as the texts says <u>"into the winners and the losers"</u>. [PD `134: 44, 45][189]

In some ways Sanders efforts to describe the force of schooling exceeded even Macionis own[190]. Sanders underscored its significance by telling the students that one learns more than just their "ABC's" at school {010}; he pointed out that they are also "learning structure" {012}. He also noted briefly how this entailed decidedly more than learning propositional knowledge, that it was more than simply learning *that*, but learning *how* {011}. He did not go into too many more details except to say that in general "there's all kinds of socialization taking place" {013} at school.

However, when he proceeded to elaborate on the concept of a "hidden curriculum" using the example of the "spelling bee" mentioned in the textbook (p. 81), it become clear that his comprehension of the concept had been partial. Sanders asked the students if spelling bees were still done in school? For those who did not know, or who had forgotten, he reminded them of the humiliations that befell spelling-bee losers and the consummate joy allocated to the winners. As plausible and evocative as such an example may have been, it was not exactly what the textbook meant. Sanders had made the hidden curriculum appear much more nefarious than the textbook had intended. In his lecture, the hidden curriculum became an *unfortunate* and divisive element in society {014}. But in the textbook the concept was decidedly more neutral and certainly not a force tearing society apart, but rather a secondary and unintended set of lessons, lying underneath and being taught alongside the regular intended ones. Macionis noted that the spelling-bees,

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[189] The transcript is stored at PD 134: 44, 45, but I broke it down into smaller segments and renumbered the lines. Again underlined parts are taken directly from the text.
[190] However, it should be noted that by not labeling his "variables", agents of socialization, he has changed the textbook image ever so subtly again. He has deprived a listener of interpreting these "familiar setting" as also referring to active forces socialization processes,

"…teach children not only how to spell and to think on their feet, but also that *society* divides the population into "winners and losers" (p.81) [my italics]

In describing agents of socialization without employing the term itself, in the vernacular and without an academic register, Sanders became a little loose with his terms. Like the conventional 'more explicit' curriculum, the hidden one is neutral and refers to *knowledge*. Spelling bees, as constituent of the hidden curriculum, does not itself create "winners and losers" (as Sanders suggested), rather in this instance, it is the lesson "that society divides the population into winners and losers*"* (p. 81). I suggest that the difference is one between a common sense banality and a sociological subtlety.

Sports anecdotes and the hidden curriculum

The textbook noted that another important example of the "hidden curriculum" was "sport" (p.81). When Sanders transitioned to the example of sports he offered one of his own anecdotes to help illustrate the point. Elaborating on the notion of winners and losers, Sanders drew upon his 50th anniversary high school reunion for material.

115   "And again, so much of our society is this awarding the winners.

116   Again[191]at my 50th anniversary, one of the football players got up and in his
         speech he basically, what he basically said was [imitating a very self-important
         elderly man] 'All of us' (of course this was back in the days when it was just men
         playing sports) 'All of us' (so that is, that immediately eliminated half the class)
         'All of us, played sports' [all quotes in a deep voice].

117   'We gave it the all!

118   'We, *we, we* went that second mile!'

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[191] In part of the lecture just after the line 008 above [PD 134 043, 044], Sanders offers an example of gender segregation in schooling that he recognized upon this same 50th high school reunion.

119   He went on and on and on to say, and finally, he ended up by thanking those who,
       'And those of you who didn't play sports we, we, we thank those of you who
       came to the games'.

120   So, you know, again. The victors, the ones who played the sports, are uh being
       uh. He's applauding them, and uh making the rest of the folk feel like they
       flunked athletics too."

Again, the thrust of this anecdote was different from that of textbook. The move to sports in the textbook was to show how, like spelling bees, sport was repository of unintended lessons. While spelling bees taught that society divides the population into winners and losers, sport taught students "important lessons in cooperation and competition" (p. 81) and to "develop their strength and skills" (p. 81). The textbook sought to illustrate the academic content that *also* gets taught in school, not that what gets taught is somehow bad! The point was descriptive *not* normative.

Hence as fascinating as Sanders stories arguably were, and in spite of the drama with which they could often be told, they stood a real chance of misleading. One of the more glaring ironies of his teaching approach was that in spite of his often faithful reproduction of the textbook (frequently at the level of the word itself) the approach did not ensure that the author's intended meanings were presented to the students.

Even if these *particular* agents of socialization had in some way been emphasized, in the absence of further explanations, the reasons for emphasizing them would have remained commonsensical and/or tautological -- Agents of socialization are significant, and their significance is based on how important they are! However in the textbook, significance of agents of socialization was explained. The textbook stipulated how different 'agents' were not equally or equivalently significant for us. For example, while the family is perhaps "the most important socializing agent of all" (p. 79), schooling (for instance) represents a momentous turnabout in an individual's socialization, which until then had been conducted largely in the family.

"Schooling enlarges the children`s social world to include people with backgrounds different from their own. It is only as they encounter people who differ from themselves that children come to understand the importance of factors such as race and social position. As they do, they are likely to cluster together in play groups made up of the same race class and gender" (p. 80)

Thus, the textbook goes to great lengths to describe the categorical and *qualitative* differences in social experiences associated with the different *agents of socialization*: the "family", "schooling", "the peer group", and "the mass media". However, Sanders' own approach was a clear contradiction to that of the textbook. By referring to 'agents of socialization' as *variables*, a term of *quantitative* difference, he categorically departed from the *qualitative* differences between social experiences that Macionis had sought to communicate. Perhaps instructors of introductory sociology must worry more about contradicting the textbook than about reproducing it.

Analysis

The chapter from which my data was obtained was an important one for laying out the special perspective on the world that sociology offers. It was a 25 page long narrative (replete with pictures and figures) about how social experiences are critical to the development of personality. The chapter made special effort to show how it is the development of our personalities that sets us apart from other species and that this development emerges from a special kind of socio-cultural learning, or *socialization*, that overwhelmingly and categorically takes over where instincts leave off. This was the *whole* that a deep (see below) reading of the text would have provided, one I suggest that an instructor should have been mindful of as they presented on the different parts of the chapter.

To examine these lectures from the perspective of the textbook from which they were derived can be an odd experience. Nuanced insights from the textbook were consistently glossed over, and at other times flat out contradicted.

What emerges from this research is an awareness of the complex relationships between common sense and introductory sociology. These relationships can perhaps unwittingly create

problems for some instructors in some contexts -- to say nothing of what they create for students. In addition, my reading of the data (i.e. introductory texts, lecture transcripts) suggests that *sociological insights* are reflected in *their departure from common sense*.

In their *Principles of Sociology* courses, Achebe and Sanders were conspicuously *marching* through the Macionis textbook. The textbook seemed to do more than just frame the courses; their lessons appeared to be reproducing the textbook itself. Yet upon examining the textbook's contents, I found this was not exactly the case; the two instructors were not able to reproduce many of textbook's most important meanings. Essentially, they failed to represent sociologically interesting or subtle meanings. Yet as interesting as these failures were, so too was the fact that they failed similarly.

The instructors seemed to adopt more 'surface' approaches to reading the textbook. Rarely did lectures portray a 'deep' understanding of the chapter. It often appeared as if a textual whole was neither sought, nor distilled. Both professors' lectures displayed likenesses to the textbook that were ultimately fragmentary. Nonetheless their lectures entailed elaborating on these fragments, but in a vernacular rather than an academic register. My analysis of the data suggests that sociological insights, as fragments articulated in the vernacular, and without a whole to constrain their interpretation, often contradict the text. An important instance of these contradictions is embodied in the use of normative claims, which a textbook written in an academic register would have refrained from using. Indeed, an unwillingness to refrain from distinguishing between normative and descriptive statements characterizes common sense -- or as Cultural Anthropologist Clifford Geertz (Geertz, 1985) has noted, *common sense* seems always prepared to interweave "is" statements and "ought" statements.

The degree to which textbook and lecture could contradict each other seemed large and varied. For instance in the textbook, Watson represented the minimized role instinct now plays in our understanding of humanity and human actions, yet for Achebe this was an opportunity to remind the students that instincts should *not* be forgotten when trying to understand behavior. In addition, the textbook also argued for the *qualitative* difference among a specific set of socialization agents, yet Sanders, in exchanging the word "variable" for the term "agent of socialization" his lecture suggested to the contrary that there was an infinite number of such agents in a person's life, each only *quantitately* different from the others.

In Sander's class, the textbook was always ready-at-hand. He would point to it, praise it, critique it and frequently quote it. He would remind the students that the sociological gospel was in their textbooks and that for truth they should read it[192]. Yet as if recognizing his own limitations in Sociology (coupled with what he perceived were sociology's own limitations) and in exchange for not being a sociologist or for not being able to give the students a more faithful copy of the textbook, he provided them with *historical* examples. This approach was compatible not only with his own undergraduate training and professional teaching experience, but followed from his perception of Sociology as little different from history in the first place.

While both Sanders and Achebe were notable for their fragmentary reproductions of the textbook, in Achebe's classroom the textbook disappeared. Sociology, slides and textbook were one. Nonetheless, there was a sense in his class that the reproduction was complete. Whereas, Sanders often recognized that his accounts were incomplete, Achebe by contrast reproduced fragments of the texts *as if* they reflected the whole. However upon analysis, hindsight and reflection, the simultaneously partial and authoritative nature of his lecture resembles the student who suggests they have provided a complete answer to a test question they have only partially understood or prepared for. Finally, I suggest this is related to the pains Achebe took to explicitly associate sociology with common sense, often introducing new sociological content (or terms) as if they were things students already understood.

Still, in the case of both instructors (if to different degrees between the two) terms or phrases with one foot in popular culture or common sense and another in the disciplines, have their cultural connections affirmed in lecture while their disciplinary connections are obscured if not denied. Note Darwin's clichéd identification with the phrase "survival of the fittest", or with the popular (but mistaken) interpretation of his theory as entailing an evolution towards a "superior species." Similarly, Freud's *life instinct* was transformed to the more recognizable *will to survive,* and the concept of personality was what you would have thought, "*just* the thinking and the acting and the feeling", no less, but no more either.

This affirming of common sense was articulated in the vernacular. The vernacular permits a very loose use of terms, demonstrating an agnosticism about distinctions that is

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[192]"Gospel" and "truth" are certainly interpretive. The license I take in using them comes from both the "preacher" label I employed earlier, itself a function of his manner at the lectern, his full time work as a pastor, the religious inspiration for his work and his concern for interest in doing *good works*. These latter points come out more prominently in the next chapter.

unacceptable in an academic register (which neither of them employed). Particularly conspicuous in this vein (and as alluded to above) was a seeming irreverence for the normative/descriptive distinction. For example, Achebe's description of Freud entailed calls for peace and calmness, and his description of homosexuality for tolerance, while Sanders a description of Meads theory of the self was construed as a means for becoming a more successful person.

Again, the ability to get the sociology wrong appeared to be licensed by getting popular culture right![193] To be clear, it is not my belief, for example, that expressing or even preaching tolerance for homosexuality is wrong. I suggest that this example however was used to make a sociologically incorrect claim about the relationship between instincts and learning. Moreover, the claim depended upon confusing a debate about behavior, with the behavior itself, then taking a relatively non-controversial stand for tolerance in that debate. Alas, the relationship between instincts, learning and behavior remained unexplained. Ultimately, a confusion about behavior led to conflating scientific findings with ethical principles.

Essentially this vernacular-leaning approach appears to tolerate an academically intolerable amount of looseness: distinctions maintained in the textbook were collapsed in lecture. Ultimately a listener to these lectures was not likely to leave thinking that sociology differed appreciably from what she came to class with. For instance, the terms *culture shock*, *learning*, and *personality*, each one has very specific sociological implications. I take each to be a linguistic tool or resource for recognizing the social. The instructors may indeed believe they are imparting these and their students may also believe they are receiving them; however, this research suggests such tool might still be at risk for neither being taught nor learnt.

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[193] Of course this is to gloss over quite a bit about whose popular culture so do we mean. This seems like a perfectly good question in a different context. In addition, just to be clear, it is not my belief that expressing or even preaching tolerance with respect to homosexuality is wrong. My point is that the example was used however to make an incorrect statement about the sociology's understanding of the relationship between instincts and learning. And was able to do so both by confusing a debate about behavior, with the behavior itself, and taking a relatively non-controversial stand of tolerance in it.

Chapter 8

Conclusions

This dissertation started with an argument that as higher education scholars we should consider modifying our approach to understanding student persistence, especially at community colleges. To take a step forward in the process I focused on the concrete teaching and learning situations within classrooms, examining instructors, students, lectures, lessons and textbooks. I uncovered numerous variations and similarities among a set of college instructors teaching the same introductory sociology course at a community college in New England. This chapter begins with an overview of the dissertation research itself. Next I discuss the instructors' *surface* and *deep* approaches to reading the textbook. Afterwards, I consider some of the implications of the Logan case, which a focus on *surface* approaches had otherwise marginalized. The chapter then moves through the 4 research questions that guided this research highlighting some of the key points. Afterwards, I discuss how significant meanings are obtained by interpreting wholes, the three kinds of effects of *intellectual engagement* (comprehension, apprehension and indiscernibility) then on to discuss persistence and Tinto directly.

Overview

My research is consistent with earlier work by Grubb and Associates (1999) on community college teaching. In the course of my own research, I eventually realized that I had rediscovered what they had called, the *textbook march*. Their research with a national sample of community colleges found that instruction had relied heavily on a single instructional process: the *textbook-driven-lecture*. They argued that its use was *more than the norm*, but instead represented the "*modal* classroom" (Grubb et al. 1999, p. 61). And though they observed a wide array of teaching styles and approaches, they were nonetheless concerned with the widespread use of *textbook-driven-courses* at community colleges, and how they were unlikely to facilitate the student-centered constructivist pedagogy expected of a higher education. Indeed, extreme cases of such courses were described rather derisively as a "textbook march" (Grubb et al. 1999, p. 17, p. 85). My own experience in the classroom re-affirmed those earlier observations and concerns*;* however, my research discovered that not all textbook marches are created equal.

When I got into the field[194], instructors' teaching approaches dominated the classroom experience, eclipsing student *learning,* causing me to rethink the categories and linkage structures I started with. For example, Achebe's focus on the syllabus, his frequent tests, the class focus on 'the notes', on grades, his desire to create a sociology major[195], placed him at the *content-centered* end of the teaching approaches continuum (Fig 2.2). In contrast, Logan's assumption that motivating the students was an important part of teaching, her efforts to use the students' own experiences in the classroom, to encourage them to construct knowledge, and her assignment of papers with topics to be chosen by the students themselves, placed her at the *learning-centered* end of the teaching approaches continuum.

It is decidedly more difficult however to place Sanders within this continuum. On the one hand he was identified with a flexibility in assessment that surpassed even Logan, and he certainly suggested that he was interested in attending to the students' "pastoral needs"; however, he was also categorically identified as "a lecturer giving examples from his own experience" (Fig 2.2) -- a content-centered strategy. Indeed, the ambiguity in his approach may have been reflected in the ambivalence many had towards him by the end of the course (see below). Beyond being able to type the instructors in a pedagogically relevant manner, even these distinctions illustrate the different ways of conducting a "textbook march."

Still these rich case studies lent themselves to other distinctions and descriptions. In particular, this study found evidence *within the course* that was relevant to reconstructing dominant models of student persistence. The cases help illustrate that instructional processes and disciplinary content were related to the persistence process. While my conclusion considers community college teaching, I also offer a few empirically based conjectures that can inform future research[196].

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[194] That is, my fieldwork setting of the NECC college classrooms.

[195] I suggest that Achebe's focus on redressing the learning *crisis* in the classroom through interventions in the curriculum and credentialing, reflect a focus on extrinsic motivators that is characteristic of content-centered teaching approaches (See Fig 2.2.). Similarly, his focus on examinations and the syllabus reflect this same approach (See Fig 2.2).

[196] In this dissertation individual narratives were built up from students' interviews over the course of the semester. All student quotations employed in the body of this dissertation were excerpted from these larger narratives. For the sake of brevity, these narratives have been placed in an appendix at the back (See Appendix 1). In addition to student perspectives of their course taking experience, these narratives contain elements of the students own life stories. Thus these longer narratives provide a context and legitimacy for their perspectives. Not only do these narratives illustrate the stark differences of perspective that are possible on a particular course, but they are highly suggestive of the "pre-entry-characteristics", labeled in Tinto's model (See Appendix 3) as well as a reminder that many of these

Departing from common sense: *Surface* and *Deep* readings of sociology textbooks

This research reveals how the differences between *sociology* and *common sense* are often subtle,[197] and that these subtleties help make teaching introductory sociology particularly challenging. I conclude that "surface" (Trigwell & Prosser, 2002) readings of sociology textbooks are unlikely to distinguish between theoretical constructs (i.e sociological concepts) and notions construed solely through lay assumptions and experience (i.e. the common sense meaning making of students and instructors alike). In addition, the *institutional context* of the contemporary community college generally (and NECC specifically) may in fact reinforce the surface reading of textbooks by instructors who lecture instead of requiring their students to read and think about the text.[198] Certainly, to the degree students confuse lay and sociological concepts, my analysis is consistent with Cox's (2009b) findings that community college students held problematic conceptions of knowledge. However, whereas Cox focused on how student conceptions of knowledge were too narrow, relying on equally limited notions about utilitarianism, my own research concludes to the contrary -- students' conceptions of knowledge were too broad, as if *everything* and anything could be knowledge. Students and instructors alike appeared unable to distinguish between common sense and sociology. This research has also revealed that institutional context occasionally eclipses even an instructor's academic background and implicitly encourages superficial treatment of sociological content.

As a participant observer in these courses over the semester, I experienced instructors' lectures as conveying a surface reading of textbooks and my analysis of the text in comparison to the lectures reinforces this interpretation. The status quo reinforces a perception that new knowledge has been taught and learned, at least at a superficial level. I conclude that only "deep" readings of textbooks evince the departure from common sense that *knowledge* makes. In addition, it is the value added difference of sociological knowledge and interpretations

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students do not appear to be coming from positions of privilege. The social class dimensions of this community college would also have been important to have researched. The students, by their cars, clothes, language, and aspirations for class uplift made this dimension salient. However, it was not a focus of my research and so my mention here only tentatively.

[197] It is likely true that a similar dynamic is operating in the other social sciences as well.

[198] This research has not engaged the longstanding discussion with sociology pedagogy about the pitfalls of introductory sociology texts themselves (Graham, 1988; Macionis, 1988; Tischler, 1988; Ballantine, 1988). Valid though this debate remains, the financial incentives to use textbooks may just be difficult to resist for financially strapped students and their financially strapped community colleges.

limiting comprehension of sociological content. Still, among the three instructors there were occasionally glimmers of a deep approach with the potential for positive effects on college students' learning and persistence (the connections between the two will be discussed later in this chapter).

For example, deeper reading of the textbook facilitated Logan's querying style of lecture. Actual questions and rhetorical questions suffused her presentation of textbook content -- offering moments for engagement and reflection respectively. She appeared dedicated to helping the students own a new set of lexical items provided by the textbook. Moreover, she tried to reconstruct responses from individual students into learning experiences for the entire class. Logan demonstrated her avowed commitment to flexibility when a student had 'incorrectly' suggested that *social class* was an example of an *achieved status.* In addition, to correcting the student's answer Logan endeavored to reconstruct it into a correct one. She reframed the student's response into one that correctly referred to a related issue of "social position", and, transformed an initially incorrect answer into an opportunity to explore the limitations of the *achieved status* concept itself, if not such concepts in general.

003   Logan: What do you think? Social Class --Achieved? Or Ascribed?

004   Student: I would say achieved.

005   Logan: Achieved. You point out that perhaps our definition is not, precise enough. If you are literally born into a family, you are born into a certain class position. *Alright?* But that class position in our society, do we say that your position in society is fixed from birth to death?

006   Several Students: No

007   Logan: No. … for most of us … we have some mobility. We move out of, we move around, up and down, around, within our social class. *Alright ?* So I`m really glad you brought that up because that uh, speaks to, the fact that this definition is not precise, it's not complete.  You`re born into a social family with a certain social class position,

but that social class position is something that we would say is the result of, effort. A result of many different things, *alright*? many different choices, opportunities, um, that your parents did or did not have, or did or did not avail themselves to. So I think I would say that social class, well social class IS an achieved status. *Alright*? To the extent that you are born into a family, with a certain social class, how did they get that position? They achieved it. Have I totally confused you? or (pause). We will certainly be *revisiting* that.

Logan's deep, broad and holistic understanding of subject and textbook allowed her to not only correct students' misunderstandings, but to go beyond them. Not only with respect to the textbook's definition, but she was able to suggests that the student's answer implied a critique of terms in general, that the student in fact expanded the concept of "social class" opening up the possibility that as a matter of intergenerational agency, social class could be ascribed too. A holistic understanding of textbook and discipline alike, allowed Logan to suggest that confusion engendered by an answer that was both right and wrong, or by phenomena that have both ascribed *and* achieved statuses, would nonetheless be understood in the context of the *full* course.

Implications for Persistence

Together the cases that constitute this research illustrate that teaching, situated in a New England community college sociology course, accommodates a diversity of individual teaching approaches. Yet some of this diversity reduces to the adoption of a *surface* approach reading the course textbook. Preliminary findings from this research suggest that such surface readings of textbooks can have negative implications for persistence.

My own experience sitting in these classes (particularly in Achebe and Sanders class) was one of uninspired lectures in the service of a march through the Macionis textbook. There were certainly moments of enthusiasm surrounding the more controversial topics, but I had a difficult time discerning the value the students would find in Sociology particularly if they were restricted to the lectures alone. Nonetheless my most direct and empirical evidence for a connection between classroom teaching and persistence comes from Julie. *If I take Estelle's perceptions of surface readings within Achebe's lectures to be indicative of a larger problem of*

teaching in a community college, I take Julie's experiences of Sander's course as indicative of a
relationship between course experiences and persistence more generally as well.

Julie and Persistence. When I first met Julie she was certain she would graduate! She
said as much, unequivocally and unreservedly. She would be the first in her family to do so. She
had taken Sociology in High School, Sanders' History course in the previous term and though
she often found school confining and tedious, she was usually a good student and could easily
have gone have easily gone to a 4 year college had she been more responsible about her college
applications. In Sanders history class she took copious notes, there was a conspicuous narrative
to get down. This was not the case in Sociology.

> " … And I feel like he kind of just wasted time, almost. Because I feel like at the end of
> the day, you were, I was not taking notes. I just sat there the whole class, and stared at
> the wall."

Along with other students within both Achebe and Sanders class whom I interviewed, there was
no need to engage with the textbook nor was an insufficient amount of discussion.

> "There were a few areas that were kind of controversial ... I feel like, you could have had,
> like there were a few discussions that kind of bubbled up, but there could have been *so*
> many more if he had given us more information, and more, like *leadership* [he emphasis]
> 82-84

By the time the course was over the more speculative and respectful tone that she had evinced
earlier in the term had given way to a clear set of opinions about Sanders and the course.

> "It's not like you dislike him, or you want to be like harsh, and like 'ah this stupid
> teacher! " But it's more like, stupid teacher for not linking things together: you know,
> your homework with your, what you're supposed to be learning. It was more like, you
> know you got some great advice, you got some really good stories, you're a really nice
> guy, you are a positive person in general, but when it comes to Sociology, you should not

open your mouth …"

Moreover, after taking Principles of Sociology (and the other classes that term) transfer was no longer at the forefront of her awareness. In its place was a sense that persistence itself was taking its toll on her. I asked her about her about the new term:

>Me: "Tell me a little bit more about how you are feeling about school this term as compared to last term".
>
>Jamie: "Oh man, I-JUST-DONT-WANT-TO-DO –IT!"
>
>Me: "But you've done it for so long. This is term number four!"
>
>Jamie: "Right! -(pause) uhhhhhh –(mock scream). Cuz, I figured by now I'd be on my way out, but instead, instead, it's like I got to be stuck here for another semester, taking **more** classes that I really don't care about! Yes! I am not psyched! I just want to **bbbbbust** right through it!" [with this last point said with considerable force and loudness]

Julie was particularly expressive about the emotion and frustrations she was keeping at bay in order to persist, with plenty of exclamations and emphases. She just *did not want to do it any longer*. The experience of courses felt more like a prison she needed to escape from than an uplifting and valuable educational experience.

By the time the course had ended Julie had decided that there was simply no sense to be made from the lectures at all, and that they were irrelevant to the chapters in the book.

>"I guess sometimes I felt if I were really paying attention at what he is talking about … and I feel like he is missing a point or something, I feel like if I were to raise my hand and ask a question about where he is getting that from, or whatever the question is, I feel like I would have so many other questions. Because if I actually read that chapter, and listened to what he was saying, nothing would really make sense, because he wouldn't

even be talking about the chapter… It would end, "blehehehehhh" (sound of vomit) it would be like a projectile question at him " 045-049

Indeed, giving license to her intellectual frustrations in the course stood to be explosive vomitous and ultimately counterproductive, and analogous to "busting" free from incarceration.

Reconsidering Professor Logan. A limitation of the dissertation has been its insufficient attention to Professor Logan. Like qualitative research in general, this project shifted directions several times. The reasons for these shifts were more historical than strategic. Essentially data from Logan's class went from being a matter of context, to one of three cases in a multi-case analysis, to back grounded again as the research focused on the surface approaches adopted by the other two instructors. Ultimately less data was gathered in constructing her case and less time was spent incorporating her data into the central narrative of the dissertation. This is an error to be remedied in subsequent publications. The matter is particularly significant as data from her case represented a powerful (albeit more tentative) contrast for the other two instructors. Indeed, if not for the evidence of her deep approaches to the textbook, the surface approaches to Achene and Sanders would not have been so evident.

There were numerous indirect signs to this effect. For example, students in all three classes questioned the paucity of classroom discussion in their courses; only in Logan's class were openings for discussion or interrogatives a conspicuous and ubiquitous aspect of *all* lectures. In her class the textbook was critical to doing well in the course yet was not the focus of the lectures. Moreover, unlike in the case of the other two instructors, I encountered nobody who questioned Logan's command of sociology, or the quality of the sociology that was being taught.

And while many students found her course boring and certainly not engaging enough for its 8AM time slot, Logan's class was also the *only* one where the occasional student who was *very* enthusiastic their course experience about her, and about being introduced to sociology. *Only* in Logan's class did an appreciation for the course rise to a level of where the student described the course as a likely watershed moment in their academic careers! Although this dissertation ultimately focused on the instruction associated with a surface reading of textbooks, a preliminary analysis of data in her case suggests that she had conducted a *deep* reading of the

course textbook and had endeavored to elaborate a sociological /academic register for the students.

As evidence of a level of enthusiasm and engagement facilitated by Logan's deep reading of the textbook, I offer the experience of Janet, a 29-year old single mother of a six year old son who dropped out of a 4 year college 10 years ago and who is now interested in going to graduate school to become a librarian.

Janet's course experience: Logan, Comprehension and Enthusiasm

Janet "loved" Logan, and loved the course. She described her recognition of how deeply meaningful and personal sociology was, as an "epiphany." [PD: 174: 004]. The thrill and utility of sociological ideas she contrasted with the mere facts one accumulates in other courses. According to Janet, the experience of those courses was limited to being "right or wrong".

> "What's fun about being right or wrong? like to have ideas and to use your brain and to come with your own thoughts and to have people listen to you." [PD 174: 006]

Janet appreciated the intellectual and emotional investment Logan brought to the course: "And I think with her, like you can tell, like she knows it! (i.e. Sociology) And she LOVES it." [PD 174: 088] Indeed, for Janet an instructor's investment or engagement is related to a student's own engagement.

> "Because teaching I think you have to give 100 percent of yourself, otherwise students will reflect that. nd I think the way she showed it, and the way that she taught it, I think that's what brought more involvement for me, because I saw that she was devoted". [PD 174: 090-091]

For Janet, comprehending sociology entailed becoming part of an exciting discourse that *transcended* the actual course experience itself. It was a discourse that entailed an ever-growing intellectual mastery that moved back and forth in time and even across disciplinary boundaries.

"You know a lot of the stuff I learned in Sociology last semester was in my Business book!   Which is amazing I think, like ethics and Max Weber. I think that's funny that it's like incorporated in Business too. And I think like this semester in Business is helping me understand sociology more. So if I had taken the Sociology with the Business, I think I probably would have understood it better. But you know, just the fact that I can link it makes me happy (she says giggling)."[PD 174: 058-061]

Contrary to the cases with the other instructors teaching, students in Logan's class would be at a disadvantage if they did not read the textbook. For Janet the textbook was not only necessary, but on occasion even emotionally moving. In light-hearted retrospect, she confessed

 "I did cry through that chapter [on poverty] I can admit (giggling) ... I was sitting there in front of my fiancée reading about like a fabric company that burned to the ground, and all the money that the owner had, and he only gave so much to the people, and he (i.e 'my fiancée) is like "what are you doing? This is sad (imitating the sad tone she presumably took that day). "I don't think I can read this chapter [we now are both giggling]

Me: You are reading a textbook!

Janet : Yeah that's what he said! [PD 174: 018-024]

Moreover a significant portion of Janet's enthusiasm for the course was related to how Logan herself emphasized understanding the textbook rather than simply reproducing it.

"... [B]ut the thing that I like is that she is not reading the text word for word. Because there are things I could read in the text and be like, 'ok , well I don't quite understand that'.   I would mark it so I could talk to her later about it, so I could clarify it. But then she would say it in a different way, and then like, paraphrase sort of, *but really in a different way*, and then I'd be like, NOW I understand it " [my emphasis] PD [174: 084]

I take this "different way" of explaining sociological content, that represents but does not

reproduce, that requires efforts from both teacher and student alike and that leads to understanding, as signs of intellectual/ disciplinary engagement and comprehension (see below) - - the achievement of which Janet suggests occurs only in special classes where agency is exercised by both individuals. Building on a conversation we had had earlier, Janet remarked how special Logan's sociology class was.

> "[this] was a different class too, I understand. Like you said last time, that there are teachers that go, 'this page, this page, this page', and she [Logan by contrast] just kind of left it up to us to read the chapter . You know, if you want to understand, any further, past the test, you know and stuff like that, then 'read the chapter'." [PD 174: 027]

That said, Janet also noted that reading the chapter was not simply for additional or contextual material, but often vital to doing well on an assignment or test. She remarked how even for the first research paper, students were going to have to read up on social norms of they were to complete the assignment properly.

> "Even the first, you know (well both of the research papers we had to do) the first one about the *social norms*. Well, 'where you going to learn about that?'
> You have to read it about it in the book." [PD 174: 028-029]

Reading the textbook was not simply important for many assignments, but was a vital element of the course itself, and not something that could be replaced or reproduced by lecture. Completing the assignments properly entailed understanding the material. And understanding the material could entail a combination of lecture, textbook reading, and one-on-one conversations with the instructor. Indeed, not understanding the material could entail incorrect assertions and incorrect paper topic choices.

> "You know and she would tell you straight out. Cause, I was there. I was in a meeting with a couple of other people who had questions about their papers. And she was like, "nope, write about something else." She was straight out, "You need; No, that's not what I am talking about. And they were like, "well you didn't teach us, how do we know

what you are talking about? And she's like "read the chapter. It tells you" (she giggles). [PD 174: 068-071]

Moreover for Janet, this was decidedly not experienced as and abrogation of Logan's teaching responsibilities.

> "I didn't see it as lazy. Because she graded the papers like she was supposed to. She had an opinion and she was critical. It's not like she was like super nice about the papers. If she didn't like something, she told you she didn't like it. So that's what I liked. That's what I found motivating." [PD 174: 072-074]

Here, opinionated critical teaching was motivating! Indeed Janet suggested that she appreciated just how much the course had been designed so as to give her agency. "And, I think that for me, it was motivating that she [Logan] didn't do the work for us" [PD 174: 068]. When she compared her experience in Sociology to her experience in Accounting, we get a sense that Logan's class at NECC was more like the exception that proved the rule.

> "In the end that class was the only class that proved to me what I can do. Because in the Accounting class, where I got the A plus, you know we had daily homework, we knew when the quizzes were coming. We had everything set out for us that we were to do. Whereas in sociology, yeah she gave us lessons, but I was on my own" [PD 174: 035-036]

Like Achebe's class where every concept and expectation was conspicuously labeled, Accounting too had the virtue of clarity.   Yet Janet saw such clarity as an all too common sign of the abrogation of one's teacherly duty. Moreover, she associated this status-quo with a use of *surface level* learning tasks and instructors who admit to having taken a "pay-cut" to teach *there*.

> "Like my Accounting teacher. I mean, I get along great with her. I really do. But you know, she was one of my 'took a huge pay cut; I worked in the banking business, and I did that, and I did that' [kind of teachers] and it's like, 'Ok. So now we are *just* filling out

charts and graphs because you worked in the banking business? (giggling)”

Again this surface approach to teaching was not something she simply associated simply with her Business course alone. Moreover it was something she suggested could ultimately have implications for persistence at a particular institution.

“It wasn't just my Business class, like I've heard it in a few classes. 'I took a pay cut to be here' [imitating an instructor]. And it's like, if you don't care that much why should I? Why should I put in the effort to care, if you took a huge pay-cut. Like you are not doing me a favor (giggles). I could go somewhere else.”

The opportunity for intellectual engagement (see below) that Logan appeared to offer was most motivating to Janet. From Janet's perspective students were told what it was they were to understand, but it was up to them to figure out how to do so. Ultimately, this entailed paying attention and reviewing what she lectured on in class, reading the textbook and seeking her guidance on issues that remained insufficiently understood

Finally, she had also been coming to the realization that her own personal experience in the course was precisely that, personal. While taking the course she had been so enthusiastic about her experience that she recommended it to a friend. And even in spite of her recommendation, the 19 year-old friend ended up hating the class. Janet explained,

“I just thought it was interesting. And she's [Janet's friend] is actually, her family is actually from the Philippines. Especially going into the chapter on poverty and racism. So she has experienced all that. So when I was telling her about it last semester she was like, 'oh wow, really.' I'm like yeah! So that's when I was like you should take the class. Then she signed up for the class, now she's like, I hate it “ [010-013]

Janet admits to being really “really excited” when she explained the course to her, but how she is “sorry” she did so. To make matters worse, she lent the textbook to her friend and must now await its return before she can examine some of the concepts she has since discovered have relevance both in Sociology and Business.

Introducing Intellectual/disciplinary engagement

Examining my research and data in light of Tinto's theory of college student persistence suggested his theory could be modified. The theory is in fact suggestive for my own cases. The domain of "institutional interactions" in Tinto's theory (Appendix 3) however needed to be drilled down into in order to focus on *interactions with course content*. Following Tinto's theory, and assuming community college contexts offer relatively few opportunities for social integration[199], attention naturally turns to the possible significance of *academic integration*. Yet academic integration has largely been measured as a matter of grades and extracurricular activities. It has not been tied directly to teaching and learning situations (Wolf-Wendel, Ward & Kinzie, 2009)

As a consequence of this dissertation research, I suggest that surface levels of reading of the textbook are reflected in the lectures that emerge from them. These lectures misrepresent the textbook, and more importantly they misrepresent sociology. This can lead to unrewarding interactions with content and an experience that ultimately has a negative influence on *intellectual engagement*, academic integration community college persistence.

I suggest that as a result of this multi-case and situated research our perspective shifts -- from a college's social system to a discipline's logical system. It is the instructors who are ostensibly responsible for introducing their students to this system. Thus, I argue that student interactions within *disciplinary systems,* and their engagement with the ideas that constitute it, create opportunities for *intellectual engagement* which in turn can have implications for community college persistence. Essentially, rewarding interactions with *ideas* can have positive implications for persistence, while un-rewarding interactions can have negative ones.

This dissertation found that within the instructors' own lectures were signs of how they had read their textbook. Whether or not the instructors had adopted a *surface* or a deep approach to reading, the textbook could be discerned from their lectures. Moreover, with few means of teaching employed other than lecture, all things being equal, it is an instructor's deep reading of the textbook that facilitates a student's *comprehension* of sociology. On the other hand, a surface

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[199] From my own observations at NECC, opportunities for social integration seemed possible with respect of clubs, cafeteria conversations, table soccer competitions; however, such things appeared to engage only a very small proportion of any class.

reading facilitates their *apprehension of* sociology, *at best*, as I shall discuss below. Whereas comprehension has the potential for increasing the likelihood of persistence, apprehension's potential is much more variable and weak, with implications for both persistence and dropping out.[200] Of course in the absence of an *apprehension* or a *comprehension* of sociology, the discipline is relegated to insignificance and (to borrow a term from economics) the *opportunity cost* of taking the course becomes palpably high.

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Research Questions

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In what follows I distil some of the more significant points to have emerged in the previous chapters. I will use the research questions that guided this dissertation as a means towards that end. Having established by the fourth research question that contrasting teaching orientations reduced to surface readings of textbooks, I move to discuss how surface readings reflect un-grasped topical wholes. I stipulate that this contrasts with deep readings of textbooks associated instead with grasping relevant wholes. Nonetheless, with data from one of Logan's students I describe how she acted as conspicuous contrast to the patterns evinced by the other two instructors. After I discuss the relationship between un-grasped wholes and common sense, I move then to empirical evidence of sociology as identified with common sense. I discuss how the problem of common sense poses problems for the teaching and learning of the social sciences in general. Next I discuss the implications of this research on community college student persistence. I show how student learning theory actually supports an influential role for institutional contexts.   Finally, I offer a note on the narrative quality of this dissertation as a whole that I hope is also a more indirect benefit to our field of Higher Education.

1) How do instructors' conceptualize their teaching situation in these community college classrooms?

Among the cases presented and analyzed several forms of evidence (observations, interviews with students and instructors, and text analysis) were used to discern dimensions of

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[200] There are certainly other possibilities here. I am only setting-up the different terms for the equation, I am not solving for the equation per se. I am also not distinguishing between drop-outs and stop-outs here.

commonality across the three courses. First, one of the most salient findings was that all three instructors were self-conscious of their teaching environment. However, the degree of insistence on this point varied among the teachers. None of these instructors approached their teaching as if the institutional context was irrelevant to how they taught -- that teaching sociology was teaching sociology regardless of where it was taught. Beyond a recognition of the power of context, this might reflect an interest in student-centered pedagogy (Chapter 2) or they could also be a rationalization for unfortunate learning outcomes or unflattering teaching practices.

Second, all three instructors perceived their students as entering their classes behind. Achebe and Logan underscored the academic under preparedness of the students themselves and how this demanded a response. Again, different degrees of insistence on this point were notable. For Achebe, the situation reflected an institution-wide crisis that required intervention in the curriculum itself. Logan was more muted in her response, arguing that her students' academic backgrounds required that she be flexible in her teaching practices. Sanders was more focused on the students' under-underprivileged backgrounds, at least on the fact that they were *not* coming from privileged ones. He described his role as one where "appreciating" the students as persons was just as important as teaching them sociology. Eventually this would come to license a teaching approach in which his own person would play a large role.

All three instructors hinted at their perceived lack of agency to change the current state of affairs. For Sanders, Sociology was a course he inherited. It was given to him to teach. And though he admits it could be different, we can infer from his reluctance that he has little incentive, motivation, or perhaps opportunity to do so. Ultimately Achebe's teaching is limited by the students' own lack of motivation and literacy. In light of such high hurdles, he feels the most sensible intervention is curricular, his answer: make sociology a major and give the students a more significant stake in the course. Logan, for her part, could not control who walked in her doors. This is not to say that she felt she had to; however her inability to do so saturated her perspective on what she must do, and on what she is capable of doing.

Finally, one could imagine, as a sort of null case, that the instructors could have responded to questions about their approaches and philosophies of teaching with answers that were equally general, and restricted to teaching in the abstract. However, *where* they were teaching, *to whom* they were teaching and their own fundamental incapacity to change the teaching and learning situation were deeply woven into their answers.

2) How did the instructors introduce the teaching of course content on the first day of class?

If the interview responses (above) tended to focus on the instructors' perceived limits in teaching the class, observing and comparing all three first days was suggestive of the situated limits (and opportunities) for learning tied to who the instructors were as persons. To capture this potential I described each instructor by a different *persona*, reflecting the dramatic role they appeared to play as sociology instructor.

The first days of class created some of the starkest contrasts among the cases. It established a set of differences and commonalities with ramifications that would last at least through the semester. And while each instructor made reference to the centrality of the textbook that day, a comparison of the 3 cases also yielded two important and interwoven themes: 1) the way sociological knowledge would be taught during the course, and 2) the nature of the teaching and learning relationship. Between the sociology of the textbook and the students was: Achebe, who, when talking about his teaching adopted a rather paternalistic tone; Sanders, whose tone was decidedly more friendly Logan's more professional.[201] By using these labels I endeavored to capture some of the provocative differences between the instructors manifested that day and resonated through the semester.

From Achebe's earlier interviews we gather that this approach imagines the roles of teacher and student to be clearly *divided* -- as if *I give the sociology, they can take it or leave it*. Sanders approach is associated rather with religious sermons; moreover, with homilies (or the commentaries that followed 'scripture'). His approach was congruent with a notion of teacher and learner roles *fused*, as if to say *we are both learners here*. Finally, Logan's teaching could usefully be understood in light of the professional tone she adopted in describing it ultimately produces important knowledge, a sort of, sociology by any means necessary.[202] Here teaching and learning depended on *joint* roles, where one has to, "hold them [the students] by the hand."

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[201] There is a longstanding debate about the value or harm in using encyclopedic texts to mediate a student's introduction to the discipline of sociology (cf. Hinch, 1987). This debate, however, has little to say about the second order mediation observed in this research, of a student's reception of sociology mediated by texts, that are in turn are mediated by instructors.

[202] My capacity to describe the instructors so, emerged from my participant observation, later- reflection upon the events of that day, and the luxury of comparing the cases with one another. However, the

It is worth noting that the ways Achebe and Sanders approached their first day often appeared categorically opposed to each other. While Sanders sought to convey proximity between him and the students, Achebe underscored the significant distances that separated them. Achebe's lecture was conspicuously compartmentalized in its structure, employing different tones during different segments, sometimes judicial sometimes jocular. Sanders' first day by contrast was a single unitary lecture, employing a single paternal tone throughout. Achebe jumped right into textbook content that first day, Sanders did not. Yet it was Sanders who brought the textbook to class and referred to it directly while Achebe did not bring the textbook to class and referred to it only implicitly.

The opposition between the two instructors' first days reflects how they conceived of their teaching (Chapter 4). For example, Sanders had argued that a form of identification with the students was an important feature of his teaching. To the contrary Achebe evinced a behaviorist's general distrust of talk about mental states, and argued instead for an unswerving focus on observable behaviors, like examination outcomes. Stark oppositional contrasts between Achebe and Sanders are scattered throughout Chapters 4, 5, and 6). However the dissertation finally settles on a point of similarity and by the end of chapter 6 the focus of the dissertation shifted to their *shared* (if unintentional) efforts to *reproduce* the textbook.

3) *How do the instructors approach the teaching of course content over the course of the semester? And what impressions do these approaches make upon a sample of students?*

Course content in Achebe's course was essentially restricted to a series of slides representing the textbook. And other than the frequent time-tested multiple-choice tests, his *notes* of those slides were the focal point for the course. Beyond his humor, one of the most common themes expressed by students was that Professor Achebe had given them everything they needed to do well in the course. If they did not do well, it was their own fault.

Personal anecdotes and textbook quotations were the scaffolds for Sanders course. The two strands were meant to reinforce one another. Yet many students claimed that they categorically did not. Still, in light of his forecasted questions and generous grading of answers,

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chapter's empirical details sought to show how the capacity to draw such conclusions was latent within the details of that day and not simply a reflection of analysis and bias.

most students also remarked how very easy the class was.[203]

Nevertheless, in my interviews with students across all three classes, Sanders elicited some of the most negative opinions.   Indeed, by the end of the course a compelling contrast had emerged between Achebe and Sanders. Very few students expressed categorically negative attitudes about Achebe's course, whereas many had unabashedly negative ones towards Sanders.' I conclude that the difference between the two was the difference between expectations met, and not-met.   Beyond his humor, Achebe's multiple choice exams testing for the recall of single factual details, his authoritarian expressions of expertise, the security of knowing where in the notes the questions were coming, combined to meet students' expectations for college level instruction[204].

This was not so for Sanders. I suggest that the anger and frustration that laced some of the opinions of his course reflected the emotions associated with unmet expectations. On the one hand, his history-filled, anecdote-laden lectures and adept story-telling suggested there was a lot at stake in this class. As if sociology, whatever it was, would turn out to be a comprehensive meta-narrative. But over the course of the semester no such meta-narrative materialized. His confused efforts to be egalitarian, with his chartable grading and predictable tests could not be reconciled with his monopoly on discussion. In addition, exercising an expertise that was not based on representing the discipline of Sociology, but on having lived a long life and on knowledge of historical details, which was not a form of authority the students would have anticipated. Finally, gaining disciplinary access was likely yet another, perhaps more subtle, unmet expectation -- a representation of Sociology as little different from History likely made access to the discipline of Sociology itself seem increasingly less probable.

Moreover, Sanders often claimed that his lectures *did not* stand alone, that there were deep meanings in the textbooks for the students to explore, that his lectures were *not* a substitute for reading the textbook themselves. Yet in the end this was not true. His lectures became substitutes for reading. His tests did not demand that they read the textbook (at least for its meanings). They only needed to reproduce those portions from the textbook that he had promised would be on the exams. In asking for a "deep" reading, yet testing only for a "surface"

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[203] He admitted in my interview with him that he is indeed "charitable" with his grading.
[204] I would add that by the end of the semester there were several students in both Logan and Achebe's class who remained enthusiastic about them til the very end. I encountered no such student in Sanders course.

(Chapter 2) understanding, students likely adopted the latter, and perhaps even resented the contradiction. Finally, just as Sanders had promised that he would weave the class into a community of learners, he promised that the course would not be a lecture course. However, by the end of the course it had long since been clear, that this was not going to be true.

Reproducing the textbook: Achebe & Sanders. To observe Achebe and Sanders' class over the course of the semester was to realize the obvious, that they were reproducing the textbook in their classroom. And towards that end, each evinced an almost *obsessive compulsive* use of a single lesson format. In Achebe's course, the advancing slides simulated the turning of pages in a textbook. And like a book being read, each class began with a quick attempt to establish where the class had left off – always forward, always in order. And though the textbook was never referred to directly, the moving slides were *icons* of pages in a textbook. This exclusive focus on slides reflected the constant presence of the textbook. The textbook was rarely ever presented differently, ensuring further the power of these icons.

 Similarly, the textbook was also omnipresent in Sanders course; yet its presence was ensured through the direct and *actual* contact he made through his quotations from the lectern. Indices of the textbook abounded, either as verbatim quotations from the textbook, or as directions to them for students to follow along as he quoted. Here too no other means of representing the textbook was conspicuous.[205] Thus while Achebe's class exhibited a seemingly obsessive compulsive use of slides, Sanders displayed an obsessive-compulsive use of quotations. *No* Achebe lecture was without slides, and *all* Sanders' lectures were dominated by quotation anecdote-pairs. Chapter 6 concludes (in answering question 3) that the textbook was ever-present, if differently represented in each course.

Alternatively, the structure of Logan's lectures defy facile summary. Essentially, concepts from the textbook were discussed and elaborated upon in class. This usually entailed engaging the class in a series of questions, with their responses written on the board, in an effort to recreate the concepts meanings with their own experiences. Unlike her colleagues, there was no sense that the order in which these concepts were presented, or the words that were employed in presenting them *resembled* what was written in the textbook. There *was* however a sense that

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[205] Certainly it takes a significant amount of interpretive skills to isolate which portions are worthy of quoting, however a use of these skill was not on display for the students; what they experienced were actual portions of text, not the means by why they were apportioned.

the concepts in the textbook and the ones discussed in class, were shared.

When she did lecture it was a form of lecture stitched together from student responses and her amendments of them. (Her amendments to student responses appeared to be efforts to rephrase them in a manner compatible with a sociological register, a process that will need to be examined in future research). Large portions of her lessons were often pained efforts at generating responses from the students. This usually entailed a series of questions that few were inclined to answer. After interminable moments of silence she would rephrase her question, often settling on a simplified version of the original. This practice likely divided the class between those prepared to answer silly questions and those who felt too silly doing so. It should be said, that in spite of her efforts to generate student responses, like her colleagues, students in Logan's class also lamented the paucity of classroom discussion. Still, these lectures were essentially obvious *efforts* at discussion.

In sum, Achebe and Sanders employed a mode of representing the textbook that was relatively direct and *unmediated.* Alternatively Logan's manner of representing the textbook was much more indirect and mediated. Logan's use of the textbook was *not* an effort to reproduce it. She did not structure her lessons, course or exams so as to *resemble* the textbook (i.e. Achebe), nor did she point to the textbook in lecture (i.e. Sanders), essentially she employed its words in analogous way to the textbook

The Achebe- Sanders focus: The presence-marginality paradox and problematic content. In spite of the continuous presence of the textbook in the class, almost all of the students I interviewed in both Achebe and Sanders classes attested to its marginality. In Achebe's class, getting sociology was a matter of *notes* not books and recalling the notes was expected to lead to better grades. In Sander's case, learning sociological content was (perhaps more puzzlingly) a matter of making sense of anecdotes and their connections to quotations from the textbook. Doing well on his quizzes was even more a matter of recall, but less a *test* of it, as students knew exactly what questions were going to be on the quiz beforehand.

Indeed the textbook's presence coupled with its perceived marginality, led me to examine how it was actually employed in the classrooms as a matter of lecture content. Finally, while some of Logan's students found her class unmoving and boring, with some motivated to pursue additional sociology classes and other vowing they would never take another, *nobody* questioned the quality of the sociology she presented. As we saw, this however was not the case for

Professors Achebe and Sanders. A very small minority of their students appeared to have misgivings about their instructor's grasp of the content

4) *How does the sociology content communicated to students in lectures differ from the sociology content in their course textbook?*

In addition to the academic marginality of the textbook in their class, there was a small but detectable measure of discontent about the quality of the content that we being presented. From my own close analysis and comparison of textbook content to how it was presented, I found evidence to support student concern about the quality of their instructors' interpretations may have been well founded.

We saw that Betsy and Estelle's describe the knowledge presented to them in class in terms very similar to the way Marton and Slajo (1979, 1997) described the "surface" approach to the study/reading of a text. And whereas the "student learning" literature (within which surface and deep approaches figure prominently) had intended to describe variation in how *students* approached textual tasks, I found it seems equally applicable to how *instructors* approach texts they will lecture from. Specifically, it seems student and instructor alike are capable of adopting a "surface" approach to their texts, one that,

> " … see[s] tasks [i.e. reading] as external impositions and they have the intention to cope with these requirements. They are instrumentally or pragmatically motivated and seek to meet the demands of the task with minimum effort. They adopt strategies which include a focus on unrelated parts of the task; separate treatment of related parts (such as on principles and examples); a focus on what are seen as essentials (factual data and their symbolic representations); *the **reproduction**[206] of the essentials as accurately as possible*; and rote memorizing information for assessment purposes rather than for understanding. Overall they would appear to be involved in study without reflection on purpose or strategy, with the focus of that study being on the words, the text, or the formulae." (Prosser & Trigwell, p.3 2002). [my bold and italics}

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[206] I have bolded the word reproduction as it will have important implications for how some of the focal instructors appear to have approached the reading of the textbooks they assigned.

By examining samples of Achebe and Sanders' lectures then comparing them to their textbook originals, I concluded that a surface approach to reading the textbook had likely been adopted (Chapter 7). In reproducing the textbook for the students, many of the most significant meanings had been lost. And as I endeavored to show in chapter 7, *I take those lost meanings as tied to comprehending the whole*. It is the comprehended whole that bestows various elements of a topic with their relative significance.

Summary. Before elaborating on how meanings are grasped from wholes and how "deep" approaches are likely to grasp them, I want to take stock of what this dissertation has found so far. An important goal of this sort of qualitative work is the provision of new distinctions, with which to frame new situations. Further, I suggest that research on teaching in general elaborates upon (and oscillates between) a basic distinction: between all college teachers are the same, and no two college teachers are alike. Like qualitative research more broadly, this research demonstrates the need for a series of qualifications. Some of those teachers are teaching at a community college; some of those still are teaching in the social sciences; some of these teachers will be conducting a textbook-driven class; some of them will be obsessive compulsively reproducing the textbook for their students. The answers to research questions 1 and 2 have uncovered additional distinctions that either affirm or cross-cut the distinction between those who seem obsessively compulsive in the reproduction of their textbooks and those who do not.

If question 4 focused largely on the impoverished quality of the sociology represented in lecture, questions 3 and 4 together help me to conclude that a powerful presence of the textbook in a class can *hide* the impoverished treatment of content. This treatment is masked further still by meeting student desires for clarity along with their expectations about expertise. Moreover, we see that *not* meeting expectations cannot even to be mollified by an instructor's avowed and palpable efforts to be empathic, generous and egalitarian. In addition, the acceptance of Achebe and the frustration with Sanders underscore the significance of course content to the students, and an interest in becoming a member of a disciplinary community. Indeed, the impoverished treatment of material is noted only by very few and suggest that the capacity to recognize this fact is limited.

Meanings as matters of wholes

The impoverished treatment of the textbook refers to the un-grasped content that a deep reading of the text would have revealed.   In the absence of reference to such unifying thematic wholes, lecturers are able to spiral off into non-curricular material. It is these wholes (once grasped) that help *constrain* how elements from the textbook can be elaborated upon. Moreover, in the absence of these wholes, elaborations in lecture are likely to be logically extended into platitudes, and common-sensical, not sociological, claims.

In my comparisons of chapter 3 in the textbook with the transcript of its corresponding lecture, we saw that the unifying topic of the *social experience* was one of the most significant *wholes* both instructors had missed. Consequently, their distillations from a whole they never entirely conceived made what was distilled, too reductionist and occasionally wrong.   Svensson (1997) has provided a picture of the importance of wholes, stipulating how they are the basis of learning for understanding. This has implications not only for students, but also for instructors who must seek understanding if they are to present an integrated, non-fragmentary image to their students.

"Learning for understanding does involve learning facts. However, the learning of facts may involve only very limited understanding. This is why it is so important to consider the learning of larger wholes and the role of organization in learning for understanding… The concept of holistic approach … suggests that, in learning for understanding within a deep approach, the student forms wholes corresponding to complex phenomena of the world, including facts and their interrelations. It is the skill of forming integrated wholes that constitutes the most central aspect of the skill in learning through understanding … [And this] is dependent upon sensitivity to the material and the exploration both of the content ... and of the relevance of the *organizing principles* to the content (Svensson, 1997, p60) [my italics]

Chapter 7 of the dissertation showed how Sanders and Achebe might have been more mindful of "wholes" in their arguments (pardon the pun), had they been more mindful of the "organizing principles" of their chapters. And in that same chapter we saw that a virtue of such

encyclopedic textbooks is their representation of these principles in the form of a hierarchical arrangement of headings and sub-headings. For instance, had Sanders made note of the fact that he was presenting on the topic "Agents of socialization", or Achebe, on the topic, "The social sciences: The Role of Nurture", and if they had integrated themed topics into the overarching topic, "Social Experiences, the key to our humanity", their lectures would have looked substantially differently.

However by adopting a "surface", reproducing approach to the chapter, they produced a series of confused and misleading interpretations. Barring elements of the textbook that were flat out omitted, my research demonstrated how topics covered in lecture could contain elements that even contradicted the textbook. Moreover, these contradictions were at the same time missed opportunities for seeing sociology as something interestingly different from common sense.

I conclude that a surface reading of Chapter 3 was the grounds for Achebe's slides and for Sanders anecdotes; however, I also suggest that such surface reading was an important grounding for the students' experience of the course. Indeed, when we compare the lecture with the textbook originals we do not see evidence a "deep" approach to studying a text, where the student *or instructor*,

> " … aim[s] to understand ideas and seek meanings. They have an intrinsic interest in the task and an expectation of enjoyment in carrying it out. They adopt strategies that help satisfy their curiosity, such as making the task coherent with her own experience, relating and distinguishing evidence and argument; looking for patterns and underlying principles; integrating the task with existing awareness, **seeing the parts of a task as making up the whole**; theorizing about it; forming hypotheses; and relating what they understand from other parts of the same subject, and from different subjects. Overall they have a focus on the meaning in the argument, the message, or the relationships, but they are aware that the meanings are carried by the words, the text, the formulae" (Prosser & Trigwell, p. 3 2002)[207.] [my bold]

That said, it also remains important to ask why these instructors were unable or unwilling to approach their textbooks *deeply*.

Sociological errors as the triumph of common sense

Nevertheless we are left with surface reading of introductory sociology textbooks at a New England community college. This research discovered that these surface readings had a character of their own. There seemed to be more going on here than not seeing the forest for the trees. It was more than simply an absence of integrating wholes that was at issue. We saw that in lecturing on the textbook, Achebe often gets the point wrong, Sanders too, if a bit less frequently. But upon closer examination, and a comparison with the other instances of problematic translations of the textbook we see, it's not simply that they got it wrong, but that they got it wrong in unfortunate places! Moreover, there was a sense that in getting the textbook wrong, they were getting popular culture right!

In light of the data from this research, I conclude that *in the case of community college instructors with a prior commitment to common sense, when approaching their textbook with the intention to reproduce its words instead of establish its meanings, sociological insights that appear in the textbook, are contradicted in lecture!* Moreover, I suggest that the imprimatur of the discipline itself, the authority of a textbook's continuous presence in the classroom, and the reigning authority of *common sense*, ensure that *textbook content* can be contradicted with relative impunity.

Cultural Anthropologist Clifford Geertz has remarked that we should not be misled by the power of common sense, or by the fact that it purports *not* to be a "relatively organized body of thought." He argues to the contrary. Though culturally variable, it has an influential character of its own. He stipulates that

"… perhaps the most important is that it is an inherent characteristic of common sense thought precisely to deny this [that is an organized body of thought] and to affirm that its tenets are immediate deliverances of experience, not deliberated reflections upon it. Knowing that rain wets and that one ought to come in out of it, or that fire burns and one ought not to play with it (to stick to our own culture for a moment) are conflated into comprising one large realm of the given and the undeniable, a catalog of in-the-grain-of-nature realities so peremptory as to force themselves upon any mind sufficiently unclouded to receive them." (, 1985 p.)

This is to say that if sociological thought is to be perceived at all, it must distinguish itself as an *organized body of thought* that stands apart for yet another *organized body of thought* – common sense. Moreover, this special role that common sense plays in teaching and learning sociology is more than just a matter of theory and inference, but a conclusion support by the findings of this research.

   The triumph of common sense: A note from the field. As evidence of the capacity for Sociology to be reduced to common sense, I offer the example of Monty. Nineteen-year old Monty was one of the most verbally engaged students in Sanders class, and, of the students I interviewed, perhaps the most positively disposed towards the course. I spoke to him just days after the final exam to get his reflections on the class. I suggest that his opinions do not merely reflect a personal perspective, but echo well beyond his own course-taking experience. About his experience in Sanders' course, Monty said,

> Monty: "But, I mean, a lot of the content I found that he was teaching was stuff, and I talked to other people in the class, they said, *they already knew it*. It was kind of like *common sense kind of things*. So that's where it was easy for me to just kind of like, zone out. You know what I mean. Just kind of like not pay attention. And that's pretty much what I started doing. I just kind of started zoning out and not paying attention to it. Not that he didn't teach a good class, but, pause, just didn't really, you know?

> Me: And what about the text?

> Monty: I didn't really like the text. I never really looked into it. I mean it. *A lot of the stuff I felt that it taught was kind of like, you know common sense*, just, it's kind of like, 'just be nice to people'. That's really what it is trying, trying to get across. You realize and put yourself in other people's shoes, which I agree with. That's a great thing to know" PD 140

Not only is the textbook marginal, and sociology is identified with common sense, but the common sense tendency to keep normative and descriptive claims ready-at-hand was apparent. Alternatively, just after the course had finished, Monty did not show signs of being familiar with an academic register or its commitment to keeping these two kinds of claims categorically apart.

The challenge of teaching the social sciences

This research is also suggestive of contexts and situations that transcend institutional type. Perhaps one of the more interesting of such findings (alluded to above) is the unique challenge likely associated with teaching the social sciences at the introductory level. Taking sociology as a systematic and occasionally nuanced departure from common sense, we see there could be teaching challenges that arise particularly at the lower levels of instruction, challenges that do not confront instructors at the more expert levels of the discipline.

Separating from common sense is like (if you will permit the simile) achieving the escape velocity necessary to break the gravitational pull of a planet[208]. Textbooks are designed specifically to help students achieve such 'velocities'; however, their full effect entails acquiring the meanings yielded from a 'deep' reading of them. Alternatively, 'surface' approaches to reading can keep even college level instructors from escaping the gravitational pull of common sense. Consequently, in the community college context, and in the case of teaching sociology through encyclopedic textbooks, it may take *extra* institutional effort to ensure that all instructors read their textbooks for the meanings the textbook authors had intended.

Hence, learning the discipline of sociology *is* learning to discipline *yourself* against accepting common conceptions. By being difficult to distinguish from common sense, many introductory sociology ideas appear to fall under what Davies and Mangan (2008) called "threshold concepts" for the discipline. In particular, they found that the introductory phase of a discipline has several basic concepts that stand to open up the subject for students: "by enabling them to make better sense of aspects they had previously thought about only in everyday terms" (Entwistle, 2009 p. 65). Perkins (2007) has found that such threshold concepts are also "sticky points" for students that emerge from a range of causes:

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[208] Common sense could also be described as a *dominant ideology*. Phrasing it thus would also address the difficulty of seeing beyond it (of course this would also add a socio-political dimension to the problem as well).

(1) conflation of similar concepts (e.g. mass and weight)

(2) strangeness of technical language (e.g. mathematical expressions -- for the non-mathematical, or foreign cultures)

(3) the dangers of persisting with knowledge frameworks that no longer work (e.g. presentism in history)

(4) inert knowledge that is easy to *reproduce* without coming to terms with the ideas

I would embellish the fourth cause to cover the special case of sociology, where *introductory concepts can appear indistinguishable from common sense and thus seem easy to reproduce, yet a true grasp of their ideas entails understanding precisely how they depart from common sense!* In the next section I would like to suggest that deep and surface readings can lead to valuable *experiences*. Whereas the experience of surface reading, at best, leads to an *apprehension* of sociology, a deep reading of texts starts a reader down the path towards *comprehension*. Finally I conjecture that such powerful experiences are congruent with the experiential and interactional concerns of Tinto's theory, and thus are likely to influence persistence through a concept I call *intellectual engagement*

Experiencing sociology: Comprehension and Apprehension and Indiscernibility

However, not all departures from the text are created equal. Getting it wrong in introductory sociology is to get it wrong in a particular sort of way. An erroneous sociological claim *reaffirms* common sense. But within a non-selective, open admissions, institutional context, composed of "fearful", disempowered students, with little academic validation, craving "useful" knowledge (Cox, 2009), we can conjecture that students might easily accept a validation of their common sense for learning. However, I suggest that this is likely experienced as a relatively low level comfort.[209]

Essentially, I suggest that the validation afforded in recognizing the utility of concepts already comprehended is far less empowering than the experience of comprehending an altogether new cognitive tool[210]. Following linguistic anthropologist (Baker, 1992) we begin to glimpse what is at stake in the experience and practice of comprehension itself.

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[210] It is certainly possible that a 'common-sense approach' to teaching introductory sociology at a community college could have its merits. Affirming common sense could have value in this context.

"Comprehension can be thought of as an activity by which one takes control of something by way of linguistic competence. That is, when something is comprehended it is taken in, included within a "comprehensive" universe of structured ideas, explored operationally, and reworded under the forces of predication (wedding generalized meanings to particular references) to emerge as recognizably the same thing, though transformed. When sense is "made" out of some uttered statement, then something different can be said about it. The demonstration of an ability to transform what is given is usually taken to be a test of one's comprehension." (Baker, 1992 p.105)

As we saw in their treatment of Chapter 3 in the Macionis textbook, for Achebe and Sanders, the *textbook reproduced* was in danger of standing for the *textbook comprehended.*

Either a student's grasp of the sociological content, or, an instructor's demonstration of their own grasp, be understood as rewarding interactions: each was likely has have different implications for student experience and student success. That is, observing an instructor's comprehension of Sociology does not confer that comprehension onto a student; nevertheless, it can instill an *apprehension*[211] of the discipline, and yet still have a positive influence on student persistence, if too a much lesser degree. Baker (1992) contrasted apprehension from comprehension in the following manner:

"Having introduced the notion of comprehension as an activity in which one has subjective transformational control over that which has been offered; I will distinguish the notion of apprehension as an activity, inherent in the practice of communicating -- and thus also in reading -- in which one confronts and takes hold of what there is to know and remember … In apprehending something one is involved in the much less self-assured and more socially engaged process of coming to grips with what there is to know without necessarily knowing how to subject it to predications, that is, how to adequately comprehend it …. It has more to do with the give and take of words that one feels belong to things substantially (as a child does in learning a language) than with the creative

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However, it does not have the same value as new knowledge, the acquisition of which is more congruent with Higher Education's more cognitive goals (Bowen, 1997)

competence to use words with conventional meanings to talk about things in one's own terms (Baker, 1992 p.105) *.*" [my italics]

Thus, the teaching and learning situation itself may not necessarily help instill a comprehension of course content for students; however they may still come to *apprehend* that there *is* something there to be comprehended in the first place -- a potentially positive experience itself, and perhaps even a precursor to the experience of *competence* associated with comprehension.   Students experiencing surface readings of encyclopedic textbooks in lecture not only miss an opportunity to perceive sociological insights or to apprehend the discipline, but it opens up the possibility that the discipline is *indiscernible* from common sense entirely, and they miss even the opportunity to apprehend the discipline.

In the social sciences just knowing that such conceptual departures from common sense existed to be mastered in the first place (or that such comprehension was there to be experienced) is not always obvious! It is relatively difficult to recognize when one is being sociologically incorrect. Because of their proximity to common sense, holding on to sociological insights may require more than just supporting linguistic contexts (e.g. an academic register) but attending to *institutional* contexts as well (e.g. policies). Bruce (2000) pointed out how it is perennially easy at the introductory levels of Sociology to miss what is distinctive about the discipline:

> "[W]e could describe Sociology as the study of social structures and social institutions, and sociological work is often into such topics as the class structure of modern societies, the family, crime and deviance, religion and so on. However to list what we study gives no sense of what is distinctive about the way we do it. (Bruce, 2000 p.18) "

Getting at the "distinctive … way we do it" if you will was entirely absent from either Sanders or Achebe's accounts. Indeed, as we saw with Achebe and Sanders' treatment of Chapter 3 of the textbook, opportunities opened up to discuss the *particular* nature of sociological knowledge, were deemed less relevant to the lecture, and skipped altogether.[212]

A final implication of this perspective is that it might be easier to teach higher levels of sociology than it is to teach the introductory levels. The latter demanding more linguistic and

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[212] It is worth noting that this was not the case in Logan's treatment of the same material.

institutional energies to keep instructor interpretations from spiraling back into common sense: while the former can assured through a use of quality textbooks, the later with the institutional supports for a deep reading of them.

Persistence at a 2-year college

As was already discussed in Chapter One, *social integration* was likely not a substantial factor in the experience of many community college students. Indeed, if they were going to interact with the college it was likely going to take place in the classroom. In light of the low persistence rates of 2-year students, and, in light of my own research, it seems plausible that Tinto's original model could use some additional specificity when describing the experience of community college students.

In addition to Tinto's *academic integration*, I posit an additional factor we could term, *intellectual (or disciplinary) engagement.* I take intellectual engagement to be a phenomena that, like academic integration, has its origins in a student's institutional experiences and has implications for their goals and commitments. However, instead of referring to interactions that take place strictly in social and academic systems *within* a college, intellectual engagement refers to rewarding encounters within a larger more *imagined* community defined by the *disciplines* themselves.

Thus, while Tinto had highlighted the interpersonal interactions that would reinforce a student's connections to that campus, *intellectual engagement* underscores a student's *instructor mediated interaction with course content*. It also highlights the degree to which he or she feels a part of a community whose boundaries are much more nebulous and transcend the campus. Alternatively, the interactions with faculty are substantial to the degree that they stand for the discipline they teach. They represent the knowledge community.

On this model, "deep" approaches to reading on behalf of the instructor are potentially reflected in "deep" approaches to study on behalf of the student. With such students, the cognitive tools of the discipline have been shared, comprehension experienced, and as incipient members in a disciplinary community, their academic integration is positively influenced, modifying a student's incoming goals and commitments (if not directly to the particular college,

perhaps directly to Higher Education).[213] In addition, in the context of a community college,
whether or not a student experiences the utility of a cognitive tool (or comprehension) could
mean difference between paying a debilitating "social-emotional cost" (Chapter One) or
acquiring the motivation necessary to persist.

Finally, numerous observers of Tinto's model have described the cultural implications
and assumptions that are built into it (e.g. Kuh and Love, 2000). If you will permit an analogy
and some metaphors: I suggest that the relationship between integration into the *college* and
integration into the *discipline* is analogous to ones integration in the *nation* and into a *religion*.
Just as being a member of nation and religion sets up interesting possibilities (or problems) an
individual need not mediate between the two. Becoming part of the college *is* like becoming part
of the nation. This much seems by now intuitively true. But I would add that being part of a
discipline is like being part of a religious community. Belonging to a religious community is not
usually at odds with belonging to the nation, indeed they stand to be powerfully (if
subconsciously) congruent. Of course ones sense of nationality does not necessarily depend on
religion, just as belonging to your college institution does not necessarily depend on belonging to
your discipline; however, for the sake of community college persistence they can be powerfully,
if not intentionally combined.

On this account integration, remains a powerful force in the persistence of students;
however, we must be more mindful of the teaching and learning interactions within the
institution, and of the imagined communities that transcend the campus.   In light of this
perspective, and my research, one wonders if *surface* approaches to learning ('inspired' by the
surface approaches taken by their instructors) could have negative effects on a student's
intellectual engagement, or for that matter, if student's deep approach to learning, modeled in
their instructor's own deep approach, might alternatively have positive effects on the student's
intellectual engagement (or disciplinary engagement)?

Following-up again with my analogy from above, in the absence of students' ability to
integrate with the 'nation' (i.e. social and/or academic integration), students at 2 year colleges
might require 'religious'/discipline centered interventions if we are to help them to persist.
Intellectual engagement and the teaching and learning interactions that influence it, might

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[213] Though Tinto's original model does make allowances for interactions with an external community, it
seems however that *intellectual engagement*, as a result of a student's *institutional experiences*, should
properly be at least one of the foci of the model.

strongly influence persistence at a 2-year college, whereas at a 4-year college, it might not even matter at all. Finally, I conjecture that the students wanted to be members of a sociological community, and that inevitably they perceive the keys to this community as held particular individual gatekeeper.

On the power of context

As a matter of academic background, Professor Achebe held a PhD in Sociology, Professor Sanders had graduate training in theology and an undergraduate degree in History; both were educated in "soft-pure" disciplines (Trowler & Beecher, 2001). Achebe had over 10 years of experience teaching from introductory textbooks[214] (e.g. Achebe), and Sanders had 3 years experience with the Macionis text alone. I conjecture that they *had* the knowledge, skills and time to conduct a *deep* reading of the textbooks. A question for future research is why they did not do so?

In light of the instructors' likely capacity to adopt a deep approach to their textbooks, Prosser and Trigwell's experiential model (2002) of teaching offers a preliminary and tentative explanation as to why they did not. Their model (Chapter Two) reminds us that *approaches to learning/or teaching* are *not* only related to the instructors prior conceptions of teaching, but also their *perceptions of their learning situation*, itself contingent upon a particular teaching and learning context.

In addition, a cardinal inspiration behind the student learning literature would seem also to apply to *teacher teaching/learning*, that "surface and deep approaches are not personality traits but most usefully thought of as reaction to the teaching environment." (Biggs and Tang, 2011), or following Prosser and Trigwell they are an interaction between *teaching situation* and *context*.

Thus, the narrative of this dissertation (guided as it is by student learning theory) suggests that an instructor's *situation* has a *more* powerful influence on teaching outcomes than we might have anticipated. The research findings here suggest an *instructor variant* to the *approaches to learning* literature (i.e. when instructors are teachers *and* learners of texts). *Thus it seems possible that **context** can be a highly influential factor in determining the quality of teaching and learning, one that is **not** exclusively determined by degree level, area of expertise, or teaching*

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[214] He had been teaching at least 6 years with the Macionis textbook alone.

experience. At the very least, when teaching sociology, context matters. How much it matters in relation to training and experience remains an open question.

Finally, an important research question to emerge from this combination of research and theory is, *how* does institutional context explain an instructor's approach to teaching? How does teaching at a community college relate to whether an instructor does or does not adopt a surface approach to reading the textbooks they assign?

Narrative Quality

A recent dissertation in the field entitled, The Influence of Academic and Social Integration, Educational Objectives, and Intent on Community College Student Persistence (Williamson-Ashe, 2009) reflects a typical use of theory.

> "In Pascarella and Chapman's (1983) study of the community college population, academic integration had an indirect influence on persistence through its direct effects on institutional/goal commitment. Voorhees (1987) found that academic and social integration did not influence persistence, but intent to leave and gender were significant to predicting persistence (Bers & Smith, 1991, p).

(I mean here simply to underscore the character of the explanation, not its merits).

By contrast, in his book *Making Social Science, Matter,* Bent Flybvjerg (2002) summarized eminent philosopher Hubert Dreyfus' argument about the need to complement social science theories, especially like the one above that seek to "imitate" natural science ones. Dreyfus had argued that more holistic and contextualized accounts of phenomena were *also* necessary. According to Dreyfus, the problem Flyvbjerg notes is that,

> "…the phenomena, which a theory selects as relevant via the theory's logic, are not necessarily identical with those phenomena selected as relevant by those people covered by the theory. Dreyfus states further that this is the case because the *context* is excluded, the very context in which human beings select those everyday phenomena, whose

regularities the theory attempts to explain and predict". (Flyvbjerg 2002, p. 40) [my italics]

The narrative provided in this dissertation offers an experiential course-taking context for students' *potential* educational decisions (i.e. persistence related decisions). In particular, I wondered on what grounds persistence decisions, of the kind theorized in Tinto's interactionalist theory, could be understood as related to students course taking experience. Hence, of additional significance here were the students' own lives. I have provided accounts of the students' own circumstances (See Appendix 3) as a context both for their educational decisions and for their perspectives on the courses themselves (See Chapter 5)[215].

A sense of injustice emerges from an image of unknowing students being offered common sense as if it were disciplinary insight. In addition, upon appreciating the fullness of the students' lives, and their relative lack of guidance through it, we are further moved that for their efforts, and for their time, they are not rewarded with *higher,* education. A final dimension of pathos embedded this situation is how, in spite of such rich, complicated, and occasionally tragic lives, the students remain deprived of a sociological lens with which to help them make sense of it.

A virtue of case studies is their capacity to represent the contradictions, complexities and ironies of life. Indeed, this description has captured many of the ironic dimensions inherent in this teaching and learning situation. Perhaps none more telling than the one that is unveiled at the end, that an approach to teaching so content-centered that it strove to reproduce the textbook and in doing so managed to obscure if not defer the content.

Another glaring irony was the majority reception of Sanders class: There was a level of discontent and disappointment in Sanders class that was *not* evident, in Achebe's. The irony is that the instructor who argued for the importance of empathy, who approached teaching as pastoral work, who identified with the students, who sought give them more than just sociology, and who sought to be the most flexible with respect to tests and grading, was on the whole viewed least favorably. While the instructor who argued for the importance of _not_ empathizing

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[215] For the sake of this dissertation's capacity to focus on the teaching and learning aspect of the cases, the student lives dimension of the accounts were moved to the appendix. They are nonetheless vital to a *full* understanding the cases.

with the student, who did not identify with the students (they were "lax" with a "shameful" command of English), who allowed no opportunities for individual expression in his exams, was viewed relatively favorably.

Nonetheless, for Flybvjerg, (2002) cases and exemplars remain critical to the pragmatic aspirations of the social (and I would add policy) sciences:

"… it is worth repeating the insight that a discipline without a large number of thoroughly executed case studies is a discipline without a systematic production of exemplars, and that a discipline without exemplars is an ineffective one." (Flybvjerg, 2002 p. 87)

Thus, a case's capacity to matter in the world of policies and interventions it must be capable of being interrogated itself. As readers of the case, we must be capable of asking "what is this case, as case of?" (p. 86). My cases have sought to keep open precisely such a generative capacity

In this last section I endeavor to summarize some of the principal discoveries and conjectures that emerge from this research.

Research Summary

This dissertation research has recorded significant variation in teaching among community college instructors teaching the same course, at the same institution and with the same textbook. This variation in teaching reduces to two contrasting ways that instructors approach the content (*surface* and *deep* approaches).

Over the course of the semester my observations of teaching were strongly suggestive of its possible impact on persistence. And from the perspective of Tinto's model of persistence, different approaches instructors take towards their content, is suggestive of the quality of student interactions within a college's academic system. On this account, teaching and learning in the classroom would be an important subset of interactions within that system.

Tinto's model highlights academic interactions and their direct implications for academic integration. However, I suggest we must also not lose sight of the teaching and learning subset of those interactions and their implications for *intellectual engagement*. In my addition to Tinto's model, *intellectual or disciplinary) engagement* mediates between teaching and learning interactions within academic systems, and *academic integration.* And while' academic

integration reflects the normative values that are being "learned" from interactions with staff generally, *intellectual engagement* reflects the actual course content that is being learned from the teaching interactions specifically. Diagrammatically, instead of a single line connecting *academic system* to *academic integration*, two lines would emerge: one line would still connect directly to *academic integration*, a second would connect indirectly *via intellectual/disciplinary engagement.*[216] [See Appendix 4]

I suggest that *intellectual/disciplinary engagement,* in and of itself, reflects a student's emerging relationship to a *discipline* -- itself a function of 1) individual *instructors* and 2) particular *course content*. The *textbook driven lecture course* may represent a limiting case of *intellectual engagement*; the case when just these two factors alone overwhelmingly determine it. As a matter of intellectual engagement, *surface* and *deep* approaches refer to contrasting ways instructors relate to course content *to their students*.

Moreover, I suggest that intellectual engagement yields three different types of experiences: *Comprehension, Apprehension, and Indiscernibility*. In lecturing on sociology from textbooks, *surface* approaches on the part of the instructor (i.e. with intentions to reproduce textbook content) yield textbook fragments in lecture that affirm common sense and offer an apprehension of sociology.

However, among instructors who take *deep* approaches to the textbooks they lecture from (i.e. with the intention to understand their meanings) and by placing textbook topics within disciplinary contexts (or wholes), course content emerges as distinct from common sense. Alternatively, *surface* approaches can also fail to provide even an apprehension of sociology. In which case, the discipline remains *indiscernible* to the student; it is essentially indistinguishable from common sense.

Again, these three different types of intellectual engagement would differently influence academic integration. *Comprehension's* effect on *academic integration* would be large and positive; *apprehension's* effect on *academic integration* would be small and positive; and the effect of *indiscernibility* would be negative and variable. Diagrammatically, the influence of comprehension would also be represented by an additional line of effect drawn *from intellectual*

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[216] (The *student learning literature* for 20+years has been elaborating on the *indirect* influences of a college instructor 's teaching upon a students learning (Entwistle, 2009). An prominent early example was research which found that instructors *approach to teaching* was related to students *approach to learning* (Kember & Gow, 1994).

engagement either out of the persistence model, or, to goals and commitments to *other* institutions of higher education [See Appendix 4]. This effect recognizes that comprehension could have implications for student success that *do not* implicate persistence at their present institution. That is, understanding in the discipline could have positive implications for attainment through *other* institutions, and transfer.

Nonetheless, the two different lines of effect drawn from *intellectual engagement* reflect two forms of comprehension: one where the significance of the discipline appears to transcend the institution, and the other when it seems coterminous with it. In apprehension the perceived significance of the discipline is less than that of the institution. In the case of *indiscernibility,* there is no perceived significance to the discipline

As a model of student socialization into their college institution, Tinto's model of student persistence ultimately refers to the process by which a student learns culture, or in this case, their college's culture. This reminds us that, although a social process, persistence also depends on *meanings*. The addition of *intellectual engagement* to Tinto's model underscores the *particularly* important source of meanings provided by academic disciplines.]

I suggest that persistence is not only a function of a student's integration into academic (and/or social systems) but to the degree they are incorporated into disciplinary systems (or alternatively to the degree that they have incorporated these systems themselves). Compared to 2-year students, 4-year students have "pre-entry" attributes and biographies associated with persistence, and their institutions often provide ample opportunity for social and *academic integration*. These students could likely persist, regardless of their teaching and learning situations. This might not be the case in the case of 2 year college students. It may be the case that *intellectual engagement* is more important to the persistence of 2-year students than that of 4-year students.

Implications for theory

This research suggests that we should consider expanding Tinto's model of college student persistence to include interactions within the classroom and with content. The research also suggests that *student learning theory* can be used to bridge pedagogically relevant features of the teaching and learning situation and dimensions associated with college student success. This dissertation's findings suggest that additional research should be conducted on specifying

intellectual (or disciplinary) engagement, both for its specific role in the community college context, as well as in other institutional contexts. Similarly, this research supports an exploration of the relationship between disciplinary community and college communities. The relationships between *deep* and *surface* learning and intellectual engagement demand further exploration. Towards that end, research must also seek to reliably distinguish between an apprehension of a discipline from its comprehension.

More generally, this research suggests that we need to move beyond a teacher/student dualism. We need understand *when* and *where* instructors should be understood as students approaching texts to be learnt. In addition, the notion that institutional context (or at least the community college context) can be just as influential on the teaching and learning situation as an instructor's academic background needs to be explored. Further research needs to be conducted on what it means for an instructor to be *committed to common sense*. How would such a commitment affect instructors teaching in different disciplines? Finally, research that explored Logan's interpretations of the textbook would have entailed a deeper exploration of the *sociological register* itself, which have helped to refine the conclusions developed in this research even further.

Implications for practice in Higher Education

1) The research suggests that there is an inner logic of the subject and its pedagogy. Sociology in particular is an elaboration from common sense. In teaching introductory sociology it will be particularly important to take stock of the common sense claims that are being isolated and academically extended or contradicted.

2) At the level of the institution it is important to provide outside expert observers who can enter these classrooms in an effort to make instructors more reflective about their teaching.

3) This research suggests that student's *introduction to an academic discipline* may be an important lever in the persistence process. This could entail making discipline-associated *comprehension* more obvious to the student, something to be more explicitly sought and made more explicit when achieved.

4) Instructors who teach with introductory textbooks in the social sciences (and perhaps in professional fields) will need to take extra special care to make sure that they are taking a deep approach to the textbook.

5) When community college instructors are employing encyclopedic textbooks, it may be important that the relevant departments insure that a deep reading of those textbooks is occurring.

6) Instructors need to be careful how they generate authority in their classrooms. They cannot undermine the discipline they are expected to teach and they cannot esteem their worldly experience at the expense of the discipline. Consequently, connecting instructors to the discipline is something that could also be supported at the institutional level.

7) Finally, this research warns of the likely insignificance of course evaluations as an index of quality teaching at the introductory levels of an academic subject.

Appendix 1: Student Narratives

Achebe's class

Aaron's course-taking experience

Of course humor is a risky thing. It has the potential to stimulate and to alienate simultaneously. Of Achebe`s students that semester, Aarron fell into the stimulated category. However in light of his otherwise dramatic home life, one wonders about the relationship between stimulation and diversion. When I asked him what he liked most about the class he said, "I love the professor, Mr Achebe." Aaron had a decidedly positive outlook on the course and appreciated the manner with which Professor Achebe sought to make sociology come alive for his students.

Aaron was 21 years old and not a first-time freshman.   Aaron went to Arizona State University straight out of high school, before transferring to NECC, where he has been for the last year and half. Next semester he plans to transfer to the state's flagship public research university. He had spent the first 16-years of his life in Arizona, in fact he still has relatives and friends who live in the state. His family only left for New England on account of his mother`s job.

Returning to Arizona for college had always been his dream. And indeed he "loved" his freshman year there. He has entered college a "typical computer nerd", but joined a number of different organization and groups, while at ASU, not the least of which was the TKE fraternity. In his own estimation in the process he acquired social skills he could never imagined obtaining otherwise. However, as positive as the experience was, it was ultimately too much of a financial hardship for his family and he returned to New England.

> "It was too expensive for us at the time, you know … with like 15 grand in scholarships and stuff, I still accrued like 28 grand in loans, so like, no! That`s not fun.  So we were like, let's do the community college because it`s like 1, 600 dollars a semester or something. So I could pay for that out of pocket, working my job and stuff, so, I`ve done that for a year and a half.  And I`m *this* close to getting my associates, but you know,

instead of coming back here for two classes next semester, I`m just going to `Flagship` University." [PD 163 004-007].

When I met Aaron, in addition to sociology he was taking philosophy, public speaking and macroeconomics courses. Though he never was a "great test taker", and never got anything more than Cs, since coming to NECC he has been getting "only A's and B's". He admits that compared to ASU things are a lot "easier here" and that "you can get away with a lot more". Still, he suggests that he is satisfied with his sociology class, even confessing a "secret love" for the social sciences, and that this course in particular might even be one of his favorites. Much of this interest in the class he credits to Professor Achebe himself.

Aaron gives the impression of one whose eyes are fixed squarely on the prize. He intends to get a job as a graphic designer and work on the West Coast, tapping into the network of family and friends that still lives out there. He speaks clearly if not insightfully about what he must do to keep engaged in his classes. The notes he takes are not for the information *per se*, but rather a means to keep active and attentive during the lecture. He sees such metacognitive skills as being hard won, and a part of him "hopes" that his peers at NECC will one day recognize what he has already learned. With respect to these skills and to his seeming commitment very concrete goals, I commented that he appeared to have his "eyes wide-open", to which he responded. "I know my whole plan I guess for the future, and now I want to go about getting there" (33)

Beyond confessing that he might be inherently interested in the social sciences; he suggested it is Professor Achebe himself who makes the class special.

I love the professor, Mr Achebe. He's hilarious. Even though he gets off topic and like talking about "weed" it's just like, all right I mean really? … Whatever. You know I think most people have done it before but, you don't have to base the whole class off of it, we already know what, most of us, what goes on there, and stuff like that. It's just, going off topic sometimes. Is kind of like all right. For the most part, it's just fun to see his life experiences, whether they are true or not. Just how he relates his culture to ours. He can bring a lot to the plate just because he's from a different society. There's a lot of interesting things about him. So he can bring a lot of entertaining, a lot of interest. Just

from that fact. [PD 163: 44-51]

Alas, I did not follow up directly with what Aaron meant by "a lot of interest", but certainly some of what he must have been referring to were the African-specific vignettes that all students became familiar with over the course of the semester (e.g. stoic adolescents enduring painful rites of passage, scarification, rural schooling, the necessity to be buried in the soil of one' s village, polygamy etc.). Moreover, Aaron is prepared to learn from these vignettes "whether they are true or not." It would seem that for Aaron, the inter-cultural experience of having an African man teach him sociology is complex enough to yield information well beyond just the content of his lectures.

If Aaron does complete a higher education degree he will be the first in his family to do so[217]. His mother completed a year before dropping out for work and his father never attended college at all. Indeed his relationship with his father and the circumstances at home are a stark contrast to Aaron's equanimity, academic accomplishments and apparent momentum. In fact with so much of his mental energies and plans focused out west I wondered how he came to be here in the first place. At which point, he realized he would need to back-up and contextualize his account. The interview took a turn for the dramatic and he responded, "well, to be honest, I hate my dad." And it appears that things between him and his father have only taken a turn for the worse since they came to New England.

To hear Aaron tell the story his mother had been successfully working for 10 years at a subprime mortgage company in Arizona. Induced with a "big pay raise" and with the prospect of heading up a team of people in the implementation of a new system, the entire family moved to New England where the mortgage company was headquartered. However, with the burst of the housing bubble, there were "basically no more jobs in the subprime industry", and she was caught in the doubly damaging position of having no job and a "specialized job title".

According to Aaron his father on the other hand had never been much of a financial contributor. Even when they were in Arizona it was "party, party, party" -- a jumbled mass of drugs, friends and alcohol. As for his father's employment, Aaron say's "he is just like a regular door–to-door salesman. Its not something, anything, special." When he met Aaron`s mother, he

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[217] That is the first in his nuclear family. I do not have data on other members of his extended family beyond his parents.

had been selling copiers. Eventually she helped him get into selling mortgages instead; however one by one, the mortgage companies he worked for "collapsed beneath him". Next his father "tried the whole home improvement industry" but apparently that ended up a dismal venture as well.

> Aaron: Everyone`s always telling him.  'Just go back to a salary job: `It would help us so much more if you went back to a salary job'.

> Me: Is `salary job` like code for copying?

> Aaron: That`s just something that will bring in a steady income.   I don`t know. We don`t even care what it is.  As long as it brings in a steady income.  Because this is *so* shaky.  Some weeks he may get like 500 dollars, and then other weeks he`ll get nothing, and other weeks he`ll get over a thousand dollars.  But most of the time it`s nothing -- *he chuckles*.

Once the "bottom fell out" of the subprime mortgage industry his mother (and the rest of the family) were essentially trapped in New England. She then turned to working in real estate, mostly in service to those who had experienced foreclosures, a population about whom "she felt badly" about.

> Aaron: When she first, um got back into it, she was doing real estate like full-time, but she was doing a lot of free work for folks that had been foreclosed and stuff like that, and that killed us.

> Me: Her choice to do that killed you guys?

> Aaron: Because then there was like no money coming in. So I was like no, we can`t do that again. That`s when she got a salary job as a paralegal.

Things are financially very tight in the household, with his mom contributing the lion-share of

the money. For his part, Aaron works 30 hours a week to "help pay for things", but as for his dad he says simply, "there`s not much money coming from him".

> Aaron: "He doesn't want back into copiers and stuff like that -- cuz he thinks he`s worth a lot more.   Just because he got lucky in one job and he made a lot of money doing it, he thinks he`s worth that. He thinks he`s worth that everywhere so he kind of snuffs his nose at what he was doing"

> Me: So this thing between you and your father is mostly related to money
> Aaron: Oh no, no, no, we`ve never had a good relationship.

> Me: You`ve *never* had a good relationship?

> Aaron: NO, no, no, no

> Me: So this isn`t just a money thing?

> Aaron: Oh no! My father and I hate each other.

Aaron lives with his mother, father and 16-year old sister. Again, to hear Aaron tell the story, his father is frequently drunk, usually abusive usually verbally and sometimes physically. His mother is "terrified". She wants to divorce him but she fears both his temper and that her daughter would lose her father in the process. Part of her thinks also thinks that without her he might just end up on the street and homeless[218]. Aaron also believes that the years of verbal abuse have so eroded his mother's self-esteem that she no longer feels she would ever find another:

> "He`s also very negative to her, he makes fun of her about her weight, tells her she`s ugly… he`s got her feeling like she is so ugly, and so trash that she`ll never find somebody else and I`m always telling her stuff different and stuff like that. [79]

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[218] A kind of caring that Aaron attributes to his mothers Catholicism.

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Thus, in addition to providing vital financial contributions to the household, he sees himself as emotionally supporting his mother, and offering a more positive "father" figure for her sister. Yet the aid he gives his mother is as much emergency medicine as therapy, " I`m the one who she can talk to about all her problems because they are always fighting" (65).

According to Aaron, what you have to understand is that "my dad is a very angry person" (58). However, Aaron admits that things could never really be good between them as his father has "always been jealous" of him for having "taken his wife" away[219]. With surprising understatement Aaron says, "He has always put guilt and fault on me, so it's gotten to the point where we don't talk anymore". Yet it is still something that he puzzles about. He knows that it has been "rough" for his dad, yet some of his misery he suggests has nonetheless emerged out of his father's poor choices.

> "It was the moving from Arizona. It was doing the drugs and alcohol. Party, party, party! I don't know if he felt like a failure deep down inside, but he just spiraled out of control." (81)

Aaron has been thrown out of the house more times than he can remember. He stipulates that at present, being thrown out has become more of an "annoyance" than much else. Nevertheless, he is concerned that things do not escalate between them. If nothing else, the logistics of staying at a friend's house is a pain.   However, just knowing that his father is well aware that Aaron could "beat him up" if he "wanted to" is all Aaron claims to need in order to endure the situation at home.   Yet it is the capacity to take the physical (and or verbal) abuse rather than to respond in kind to it, that is most important to Aaron.

> That`s why I don`t know, I started going to the gym and stuff like that so he knows I could beat him up and stuff like that. So he'll bark at me and he knows that I can take *a lot*. And that I can usually just shrug it off and walk away from him and so I let that happen. Because I am not someone who is going to get into a fight with someone and have either him or I leave the house or something like that"

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[219] Aaron says that he was the reason that his parents got married in the first place.

Again for Aaron, what is most important is that "He knows that I am stronger than him" 56,

However, not all of the flare-ups have been so one-sided or controlled. Eventually Aaron shared an incident he believed symbolized his relationship with his father.

> Aaron: "Basically to really define everything -- The first day we moved here, waiting to go into our new house, we were staying at a hotel. It was over in Cornwall. The first night he got into a fight with me, and um, and he just kept attacking me, attacking me, attacking me. So I took a suitcase and I hit him in the head with it. And he, um, threw me down on the ground and started hitting me in the face. That was, that`s basically like a description of our relationship ever since we've been here"

> Me: Did your sister see any of this?

> Aaron: Oh yeah.

> Aaron: She knows we`ve never had a good relationship.— (he chuckles) So, its, its, uh whatever. I mean (in a dismissive tone of resignation).

Aaron suggests that the situation has devolved to a point where his father now takes his meals "somewhere else in the house", while he, his sister, and mother eat together.

Before returning to our discussion of academics, it was important for Aaron that I be able to put all that he had just told me into its proper perspective.

> "Whereas you would think I`d have a lot of emotional damage from this. I don`t. I've learned to live with it. But it`s something hopefully soon we will work through … My family, are very strong people. It`s tough to crack us."

As for schooling, Aaron admits, "I did poorly in high school, but out of that I learned to get myself together". Moreover, with the help of clinical psychologists and the "tips and stuff" they gave him to "work with" his ADD, he has learned how to "mange" himself much better. In

spite of what he had stated earlier in our interview, the decision to attend the flagship university in the state was not exactly set in stone. He said he was also concerned that he might not be able to concentrate on his studies at a University where there was also so much partying[220]. Consequently, he admitted that he was also considering the putatively more subdued atmosphere of Eastern State University.

Cost was also a critical piece of the decision making process and the regional state university was significantly cheaper. Moreover, his mother preferred for him to attend the state university as it was closer to home and would allow him commute. To convince him she promised. "I`ll build out the basement for you!" (61) Still, Aaron knew that the drama of his house and the relationship with his father was not conducive to his long term plans.

That said, other than occasionally going off topic, there was little Aaron had to say that was critical of Achebe's class. Even the frequent references to drugs was forgivable in light of the course overall. (I too recalled the marijuana references; ultimately they became moments of comic relief when he brought them up). In the course, they essentially became his default examples for "deviant" behavior -- where the idea of *him* raising *that* topic *there* was only part of the humor, with the comic effect accentuated further still by describing the subjective experience of drugs as "flying", and by the flapping of his hands at the sides of his chest.

Between moments of hilarity or the more frequent, if less self-conscious, efforts at slapstick humor, the class could often be a spectacle of the absurd. The grounds for which were laid in the banter-like and jocular tone he helped establish on the first day of classes -- from the opening interactions with the syllabus where he was pressed about how many wives he had back in Africa, or when he claimed that he would leave his town were any of his students to move there.

Ayshe's course taking experience

Ayshe is a very large 30-year old African-American woman, one of two visible African Americans in the class. She sat towards the center of the classroom and in spite of her unmistakable presence did not seem particularly close with anyone. That said, having to

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[220] He had several friends who were enrolled at the flagship university in the state and been to many of their parties.

compensate for a small peer group is something she has dealt with before. I had asked her about her social circle in high school:

> Me: Your friends in high school, where did they end up going, mostly? Or what did they end up doing? Did they go to college?

> Ayshe: uh (pause) Me being a black girl in an all white school, I really didn't have too many friends … because you know, in the 80s and 90`s, it was like still, you`re not, we were allowed to have, to be friends in school, but not out of school." {PD 164 29}

Whether she had a large peer group or not, one thing about which there can be little doubt is that Ayshe has an uninhibited and inveterate laugher.   She was so gregarious that all pauses in our conversation felt awkward and conspicuous. When a discussion did erupt in class, Ayshe was inevitably one of a handful of contributors. And when I asked her what she liked most about the class, she was emphatic -- conversations (when they occurred) were her favorite moments.

> "Yeah, like when he actually does start to get into the conversations. I do like the conversations. You know like how we debate about certain things, and put in our opinions and that part I like about the class … "[PD 163 103]

 She has always been "good at math" and 10 years ago, straight out of high school, she enrolled as a pre-med student at an inner city private university.   She completed a summer term there, but halfway through the fall semester her son was born and she dropped-out. Knowing how expensive such universities could be I asked if she had received any scholarships.

> Ayshe: "No. I got. What happened was my mom was supposed to help me. That was so long ago (she giggles as she recollects). It`s a long story.  My mom was supposed to help me, by the time she said she had problems with, I guess, welfare, and that she didn't want to help me fill out the paperwork.  That`s the excuse she gave me, but now I know it's all a bunch of bullshit.

Me: Well, she might not have known all the ins-and-outs.

Ayshe: Oh. No, she did. My mom`s a money hungry bitch! So my dad who had three jobs at the time, helped me fill out with the paperwork, which, you know, having a dad with three jobs -- student loans, which sucked. Still paying for it (she says under her breath) … I owe 10, 000 dollars. PD 164 21-28

As she said, that was a long time ago. In point of fact, by the time I met Ayshe, her mother, and her mother`s mother, were helping to raise her 10-year old son.

In addition to sociology, Ayshe was taking biology, chemistry and physiology. She plans on entering one of the state`s nursing programs and become a registered nurse. In light of her heavy science course load, and that she had previously been a pre-med student at a 4-year university, I suggested that the sociology class must be one of her easiest courses. In frustration, she sighed, "No". I was unable to conceal my surprise. But she was insistent, and unequivocal: "All of my other classes are a whole lot easier than this one"[PD164: 55].

Of the six tests required for the course, she has received marks of 52, 62, and 68 on the first three. Because she needs at least a "C plus" or better to be admitted to a nursing program, she has resigned herself to the fact that she will have to repeat the class. She presents her inability to succeed in this course in two parts: On the one hand, she has serious misgivings about how the questions on Professor Achebe`s tests are worded, and, she is disappointed in the limited amount of time set aside for classroom discussion. According to Ayshe, had the tests been phrased more fairly and clearly and if interactions with the students had been more common place, she would have succeeded in the course.

She was exceedingly frustrating with the situation. In spite of her poor grades, she feels that in reality she knows the correct answers to the questions. It is the complicated and unnecessarily elaborated character of how they are worded that keeps her knowledge from being assessed. On her tests, she claims to have spent more than half the time allotted, just figuring out exactly what the questions mean, and thus has only a small fraction the time left with which to answer the remaining questions.

"I think this class is only hard because of the way he states his questions on these exams. He states like he`s talking to people from Yale -- first I have to decipher the question and then answer it correctly."

Hence, it appears that the language in which the questions are written, together with the time-tested nature of the test itself, combined to put limits on what Ayshe ultimately could achieve in the course. She explains her testing experience thus:

"He gives us an hour for 50 questions. So that gives us a minute, a little bit over a minute for each question. Well, if it takes me 2 minutes to try to figure out what the hell you are asking, I`m already going to skip half of the questions, because I`d rather get a wrong answer than get a zero for not answering a question. So, I`m trying to beat the time and I`m reading fast. I`m not fully understanding the question and I`m getting wrong answers, because I`m putting wrong answers cuz I`m not fully understanding the question … And then I go back and I`m like damn I got that answer wrong! *Only* because I was reading the question too fast to understand what the hell he was trying to ask me, and that's` why I m getting a 52, a 60 and a 68 on my exams (her emphasis)."

Thus, Ayshe approaches this test, much as a standardized test taker who knows they will not be penalized for wrong guesses -- she first and foremost makes sure she has answers for all the questions before the time has elapsed. Alas, she seems already to have done the math and it appears that even with employing such strategies, she feels she will not succeed in the course. More to the point, even when answering *future* questions, no matter how thoughtfully or authentically, she cannot be sure she that she will have understood the question correctly. To illustrate her problem with Achebe's tests, she described a previous experience, albeit with a fictitious, if not mocking, example:

"And then, when I go back, and I look at the question, and the question says something like (*in a ponderous, affected manner she says*] `Oh, that picture, on that white wall is by itself, is secluded in, but it needs to have some dee-cor` (i.e. décor). [*Abruptly speeding up her speech she continues*] Instead of just saying, `the picture`s on a **white** wall need

some decoration!` [*said matter-of-factly; with the emphasis in the original*]. You know

what I`m saying?  And I`m like, what the hell you trying to say?"[221] PD 164 83-84

The example is imaginary, but the sentiment is not: overwrought sentences and needless

embellishments when simple vernacular would have done just as well. If this were not

exasperating enough, she is quite certain that her own ability to do better on the exams (much

less anyone else`s) could have emerged from a better grasp of the material, which would have

emerged through greater amounts of classroom interaction.

"… and when he adds more of *that* [e.g. "conversations", "debates"] in the class it makes

us more knowledgeable of the subject that he is talking about, you know, because we are

putting our own thoughts into our own experiences in with it. So that helps us link, you

know. So when we do have that test question we are more, 'oh wait, I understand that

question', you know what I mean?" [PD 163 103]

 Finally, she is unabashed in her belief that classroom discussion was *prematurely*

circumscribed during the course. After a long pause, reflecting on classroom discussions in

general she remarked,

" …I always like the interacting part. What I don`t like is when he, when it gets started,

and like it's going to start doing that and he cuts it off. And then it goes back to the sl

(presumably `slides`). And it's like: `Um, I thought we were just (she pauses, and than

in a tone of resignation she says) ok". [PD 163 104]

Ayshe then asked me if I recalled an episode last class when this had happened:

Ayshe: Remember he said, he put up on the board, uh -- `Discussion topic`? Yes we

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[221] Ayshe was able to get credit at NECC for the English Composition 101 course she took at the private 4-year institution 10 years ago.

started discussing, we only discussed *half* of the question, number one. But he gave the online people 3 days, a week.

Me: You guys got three minutes.

Ayshe: Exactly! (she giggles). And then we only discussed half of the subject. We didn`t even discuss half of the question, and he completely dismissed it and went to the next thing. And I was like, what happened to the other half of the question? And you know, gosh, only a couple of us got to make our point of view on it (in hindsight, she chuckles at the unfairness of the situation).

Me: It seems that his heart wasn't really into the group discussions.

Ayshe: Exactly! It sure wasn't! [PD 163 106-117]

Achebe, Aaron and Ayshe: Convergences and Divergences. With respect to classroom disccussion, like Ayshe, Aaron also recognizes its absence. The two students depart however in their experience of where the fault for its absence lies. According to Aaron,

"There`s not really too much I dislike about it [the course]. I just wish there was more positive input from the class" [PD 163: 112].

While Ayshe sees real problems in how Professor Achebe sets aside time for discussion and in how it's managed when it does occur, Aaron's perspective is more congruent with Achebe`s. Aaron suggests that if there is little conversation in class, the students have no one to blame but themselves[222]. Reflecting on the class in general Aaron suggests,

"A lot of people are afraid to speak or a lot of people just don`t care enough. It`s just,

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[222] Recall that for Professor Achebe, classroom discussion is constructive to the degree that it is restricted to questions about course material not understood. Alternatively, Ayshe suggests a much more expansive role for classroom discussions to play in learning.

you know, that extra, what is it … human or social science or something credit. It's just that *extra credit* so people don`t really put too much into it ... a lot of people don`t put too much interest into it" *my emphasis* [PD: 163 114-116]

Presumably when Aaron refers to 'extra credit', he is speaking about the significance (or insignificance) of a sociology course as general education component in a curriculum. And like Achebe, *if* there is a problem in the classroom, it lies in students who are *unwilling* to participate, not because they are *unable* to do so.   Nonetheless all three, each in their own way, allude to problems of student learning that may exist in the classroom.

According to Achebe some of the problems of student learning in the classroom are rooted in the experience of taking courses outside one's major. Achebe suggests that taking courses *outside* their major, deprives students of a motivation they would have had, had the course been *within* it. Thus they are not motivated to recall course content later. Referring to a student who had forgotten material she should have remmebered Achebe explains:

"And then I asked the students about, `what do you know about Sigmund Freud`?   And they reviewed it last semester! She said, 'I forgot.' Because for her, it was one of the courses she took in order to graduate with an associate's degree … business, human services, whatever it is and so forth ... Many of the students who go to college, even four-year colleges (and I can tell you that, even for yourself too, included) when you go to college and you don`t, and you're not *majoring* in, sometimes you don`t even take too much interest in what is going on, because it is a requirement of the college. This is why, I sometimes tell my students, I challenge the American way of say, `you have to take Chemistry, you must have Physics, you must have blah blah `whatever it is and so forth; when some of us are not cut for that. Yeah ... We just go there [a general education course] because we want to get 3 credits in order to graduate. But if you asked the undergrad what do you understand, they say, ` I have no idea`."

Achebe seems to identify recall with understanding. Nonetheless, his solution to both is the placement of student courses in their appropriate *curricular* context -- the sociology major! Indeed, while conducting this research Professor Achebe was writing a proposal on the benefits

to students of a Sociology major, and how the college could take steps to create one. Achebe saw the merits of a major as being able to provide a "home" for the academically homeless, students who found themselves in the catch-all, safety net of a major, the "Liberal Arts", would thus obtain a sense of direction and motivation they otherwise did not possess. Essentially, for Achebe, unless the student learns the sociological material in an "applied context", the material will neither be engaged nor recalled. Professor Achebe summarizes his point thus:

> "… if you are offering a major in that area, because that's where the students now want to say, `I have to know, because I am going to use it! I am taking the sociology I am going to use it`."

Thus between Aaron and Achebe some of the problems associated with the course-taking experience emerge from without and from within: 1) on the one hand students are uninterested in seizing the material before them and 2) given its marginal place in the curriculum, as a general education course, students are not empowered to do so. Yet from Ayshe`s perspective, the experience of classroom interaction is critical to being able to seize the material. Her gregariousness makes her keenly aware of the truncated opportunities for interaction (and inadequate if not unfair testing) that most needs correcting if she is to do better.

Brittany's course taking experience

Surprisingly, Brittany and Professor Achebe largely agree. And though she concedes that the community college is indeed an intermediary institution, she does not however suggest that it is thus relegated it to an intermediary status. Brittany is a pretty and affable 19 year-old young woman who likes to accessorize. Her mother says that she`s a 19 year-old in a 40-year old body.  Given Brittany`s composure and candor, I think I see what her mother was getting at. Brittany is from a small town about 25 minutes from the college.[223] Her graduating class had 150 students and she graduated towards the top of it. Her success in high school led her to enrolling at Eastern State University for her freshman year.

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[223] Less than 5, 000 people.

Until that first year of college she "had done really, really well." in school.   She achieved "good grades …[was] always on honors and high honors". She had "always liked math and writing" and "always hated History".   Moreover, she had a relatively positive experience at Eastern; however, the new freedoms and perpetual distractions added up for the first time in her life, to some poor grades.   She decided to transfer to NECC, to develop some better academic habits, and return to Eastern for her senior year.

> "… Like when I was at Eastern, you would get out of class and then go back to your
> dorm and like do whatever, you know. There wasn`t any kind of like schedule.  I wasn`t
> on any kind of like schedule. I kind of just did not do well.   And like here I'm more on a
> schedule. Like I go to class, then I go home, then work on my homework. I`m at home, in
> my surroundings, not with like my two other roommates distracting me, and like
> everything like that."

Going to NECC has also allowed her to combine classes and work. Currently she is working 20 hours a week, but expects to increase her hours to 40 as soon as possible. That said, just as important as the paycheck she now enjoys is the regimentation, which in addition to income, was also absent from her experience of taking courses at Eastern. Essentially, academically and socially, the college experience was more demanding than she had anticipated.

> "My high school always talked about preparing us for college and everything like that --it
> *totally* doesn't. College is so much harder than high school … It`s not even close " 41

At NECC in addition to sociology Brittany took Literature, Composition, Earth science and Jewelry courses. I asked her, what she thought of the sociology "class":

> "I like it. I think he is a good teacher. I like how he can like tell stories and like really a
> lot of things. Like he is not just strictly reading out of the book, off of his slides. Like he
> knows a lot about what he is talking about. And like he puts things in different words to
> like, so you better understand like what the different things are. .. I just like when he
> relates things … like what`s like going on with families, and you know, talking about

parents and things like that and like he'll tell his stories of like him growing up."

Early in our conversation she confides, "I really hope that I graduate college. Like my mom didn`t graduate, my dad didn`t graduate." In point of fact her mother never attended, and her father dropped out after a year of technical college. Moreover, her brother joined the army and her sister "flunked-out" of Western after only a year.   She seems to suggest that the odds might not be in her favor.   That said, the only reason she did not apply to Western herself was that her father reasoning that if she actually succeeded at the institution where her older sister did not, it would set-up an unhealthy rivalry between the two of them, where "their lives would be in competition with each other."

When I asked Brittany about what she found most engaging in the class, like Aaron, she said it was his stories.

> "I liked his stories. Like telling about, like I like learning about different things and him talking about his culture and being over in East Africa and everything like it's very interesting to me, like just seeing how different people live and think of things" 89-91

Moreover, she is quite explicit that these stories were not mere asides, they had concrete implications for pedagogy and for how well she does on the tests. In point of fact, I asked her directly if she thought these stories "added" to the class. She replied,

> "Yeah it makes me like, so then when I'm taking my test and things and like something will stick out and I'll be like 'oh yeah, I remember him talking about that or like telling that story"

(I did not question follow up with Achebe, but I imagine that he agrees with such an impression). It does appear that the value Ayshe places on classroom discussion, Brittany places on his personal stories.

Brittany seems to echo Professor Achebe's description of community college as

intermediary or "bridge" institution, between high school and the 4 year college. Nevertheless, unlike either Achebe (or Aaron) Brittany sees no great (certainly no categorical) difference in the course-taking experience between 4-year and 2-year institutions[224].

Me: Do you think that NECC acts as a transition for you? To sort of get up to that speed? (i.e. the academic rigor of a 4 year college)

Brittany: "I think it does. Because like you come here, like you are going to high school, but the work and what the teachers expect from you is at the college level, compared to high school"

Me: does the teaching compare between the three places? … high school, Eastern, and NECC. What`s the teaching like?

Brittany: High school, I feel like we got off topic a lot. You know because there is like a bunch of other things going on, at the school like dances and homecoming … Eastern it was similar to here, like the class sizes, and you know, the work that you were given. Like they both have like the same expectations I guess.

Me: What about how the teachers ran their classrooms? Um. Do they run them like Achebe does?

Brittany: Um, pause, yeah. Like they, you know they don`t really tolerate cell phones, not as much talking. Like there is practically no talking in college, I feel like in any of my classes. Like no social time; like you go to class to learn, and do what you have to. You don't go to class to talk and stuff, which is like what high school was like. Socializing a lot. So, (long pause) I mean, eastern and NECC are pretty much the same, like teaching wise, the way the teachers teach. Like. I don`t know.

Me: You're not feeling any huge difference there.

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[224] That said, Aaron had already been at NECC for a year and half.

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Brittany: yeah -- no, just the only thing is that, Eastern I was living there, here I don`t, commuting.

For Brittany high school stood out for its social dimension: for the ability of the social even to insinuate itself even into the classroom, while college classrooms were relatively impervious to its influence.   Yet for Aaron, 4-year ASU was a social boon; an experience for which he is forever grateful. That said, for both Ayshe and Brittany, the tests are an unpleasant experience.

"I`m just like not a fan of like the tests online.  Like, I like that they are online, that you can sit at your house and take it, but like, reading it on the screen and having that timer counting down.  I`m just like, uhhhh (she shudders)"

Brittany admitted that she "was not an A" student in this class, and that she was getting only mediocre grades on his tests (achieving a 72 or a 74 "on average"), and that this was without opening up the textbook. I asked her about the actual composition of the tests, whether they followed from the lecture, or from the slides. She responded, "mostly from the slides there is say, out of the 50 (i.e. questions) there is probably around 5 that come from the text." She says it's pretty easy to tell which ones come from the book because they say so explicitly. "He like kind of just says straight up, `in the book…`"

I asked her how she prepares for the tests? Her answer, like that of most her fellow students in this class, affirmed the overwhelming significance of the *notes,* and the relative insignificance of the textbook.

Brittany: I read through all my notes and I usually like. Like on the first quiz I totally did not know what to expect, but now that I know how he sets it up; like it`s almost like he's just going right through the chapter in order.   So like I read through all of my notes, and like I underline certain things …"

Me: These are your notes from the overheads? What about some of the other notes. He`s

got some additional notes that are also available online. Do you ever download any of those and look at them?

Brittany: No.

Me: Like the text, you haven`t found that those were necessary in order to do ...

Brittany: Not really pretty much everything is just right off his slides. So like I just write it down and listen to what he has to say, and just kind of like absorb it as much as I can.

Moreover, like Achebe himself, Brittany believed it important that I understood Professor Achebe had given her (along with the rest of the class) everything they needed to succeed. Hence her mediocre grades, and the fact that she was only getting "mediocre" grades in the class was entirely her fault.

> Brittany: "There's not really anything I don`t understand.  I think like right now my grade is at the level it`s at because I`m not putting….  It`s because of *me*. Like *he`s* teaching everything he needs to teach and he`s provided us with the book, and the notes, and everything we need to do. It's my, like *me.* I'm the one who should be reading the book. I'm the one who should be reading the book. I`m the one who should be like taking better notes say and *actually* studying for the quizzes, as opposed to just reading through. It`s in my hands. I can get the grade I want to get, but, I, just don`t.

> Me: So as far as you are concerned, if there is any deficiency in this class, it's all you.

> Brittany: Yeah

> Me; That`s a lot. You should ease up on yourself again.

> Brittany: Well it is, like that`s how you have to think of it. The teachers are providing

you with everything you need to do. It's the time and effort that you, like what you take

out of it. I`m not putting in as much time or effort as I should be.  Like I just don`t.

Betsy's course-taking experience

After 3 months of interviewing students, I hadn't really met someone whose perceptions of the course closely matched my own, that was until I met Betsy. Betsy was doing very well in the class, without even factoring in the 6th and final exam; she already had about a 90 % average. However when the interview moved to a discussion about the course overall she immediately confessed, "I pretty much did not retain anything from the class" and this she suggested followed from how the course was taught. The first thing she wanted me to understand was the predominant experience in the classroom. Referring to what essentially was Professor Achebe's approach to teaching the course she said,

> "Like he pretty much printed the notes that he would show in class every day; they were
> on line; it was the exact same notes. And I just felt as though we were reading them,
> every class, and there really was no discussion. We were just reading the notes" [PD 162

Next she moved to describing her experience with the examinations:

> I don't know if you could see the exams that he was giving out or not ... If you printed out
> those sheets than you could sit there, take off the exam,   and just like check off things
>   and get a 90 or better. I didn't understand how people were doing poorly in the class.
> I talked to a couple of people that were like ah I got like a 59 on that and I'm like,   'How?'
> (Emphasizing utter perplexion). You didn't even have to do anything. It was like multiple-
> choice and an answer sheet is right there! Like I don't understand. [PD 162

Betsy was a highly verbal, self-assured, fast talking 26-year old single mother who was returning to school to be a teacher. When I met her, this was only her first term at NECC. After obtaining her associates degree she intended to transfer to a 4 year college, thus she was in the liberal arts and sciences program, and, in addition to Sociology was taking, English 101, Intermediate Algebra and Western Civilization. Her work schedule was no less ambitious. She

was working 50 to 60 hours a week: On Monday, Wednesday and Fridays she worked at a daycare and from and at a guitar store on the weekends. Nonetheless the term was coming to a close and she was getting A's in all of her classes. As she is taking a full load of courses and without any remedial courses to complete she may indeed obtain her associates in 2 years as she plans.

Ironically, she never really enjoyed being in school as child. There we just too many things to do that were more fun and interesting. Still childhood was a golden age for her, if anything marred only by school. She lived in a large house, with her mother, father, sister, two than unmarried uncles, an aunt and uncle who were married and their two sons, her cousins, who were essentially the same ages as she and her sister… "just a big, Irish family." It was perfect. A bit of a "tom-boy" herself in those days, she remembers pretending to be sick quite a bit so that she could stay home and play with the younger cousin who was not yet in school, "so I just wanted to stay home and play with him all day, pretty much." She said, "I was a terrible student. I guess I am just kind of an underachiever and procrastinator. I just kind of didn't go to class ... I did not like being in school."

> "When I was younger, you just, you are kind of slowed by the public school system. They are having to deal with so many different levels of ability so that you just kind of get bored and you don't really want to be there, because you might already know what is going on in the class or whatever. So you just kind of find what you need to do to kind of skate by"

She admits that her earlier lack of affection for school was certainly not due to a lack of parental concern, who in fact she were,

> "... strict, and always kind of wanted me to do well, and tried to get me to do well. I kind of found a way. I consider myself like a reasonably intelligent person so I could kind of skate by on bare minimum which is kind of what I've done (giggling) I find out what needs to be done in order to kind of get through." [PD 162

In fact when she arrived at high school, she knew that with its conventional curriculum she was

going to be in trouble. So she petitioned to enter an alternative high school in her city.   The high school was a *school of choice*, with anywhere from "75-150 kids at any time". It was an academic experience that truly loved. "I think they should have one of these in every single city or at least major cities".   That said, it was ultimately an "alternative" high school:

"I hate to say this because it's a great, great school, and it gives a lot of people like another chance. Its kind of a lot of kids last stop before dropping out, or, going to jail. I was kind of like the drop out candidate." [PD 162

To hear her wax nostalgic about the high school, it would appear that with it, Betsy's experience with formal education changed dramatically. She went from poor grades and poor attendance in elementary and middle schools to being a "straight-A student", with "perfect attendance" and graduating a year early. She argued that the curriculum at the school was both very "hands-on" and highly adaptable to the interests of the individual students. To describe the alternative high school she attended, she compared its curriculum with that of traditional high schools.

"Their program is different than like the regular curriculum of the high school. So, although they have certain requirements that they can't skirt around, they do a lot of different things that they can kind of flex on. As opposed to having like regular gym class, to get gym credits we went snowboarding, ice skating, kayaking, canoeing, things like that and then they will give you like a portion of the gym credit for these activities, as opposed to standing in gym class and playing kickball. Or you could play a sport at [the local] high school and get credit that way.   As opposed to taking like a regular science or chemistry class, we spent my entire time there running tests on some of the local rivers in Danbury and actually got legislation changed because we proved that there was a higher level of pollution than they had anticipated. So we   did that as part of our science class. So they just do things, like differently. It's more like hands-on." [PD 162

I recall struggling to reconcile the different strands of Betsy's life in my head (or at least my preconceived notions). I asked her again why she had transferred to this high school in the first place, to which she emphatically replied, "I wanted to graduate high school. (pause) I didn't

think that I was going to otherwise." Nonetheless, she completed her high school education at 17 and promptly moved by herself to New Orleans, where she lived for four years. Again, I asked how she came to make this decision. Betsy always wanted to go to higher education, she just didn't know for what, so moving South was part of an effort at self-discovery, but perhaps even more important, she simply "liked to travel"

> "I remember sitting on my parents' computer and Googling places, and buying a ticket and telling my family I was going there. There was no real (she giggles). Just a vacation point." [PD 162

While there she enrolled in the University of New Orleans and took courses part time while working at the bars on Bourbon Street. While at the University she was able to take some sort of teaching internship and through that came to see herself as an elementary, perhaps middle school, teacher. The interview we had was wide-ranging and we spent some time talking about her experiences with hurricane Katrina but I also needed to bring her back to her experience of the Sociology course.

I asked her how she approached Achebe's course. She admitted that while she had read the textbook "entirely" before the first test, after that test, she recognized that it "definitely wasn't required." Nonetheless, she would continue to more casually read the textbook throughout the term both because she was interested in the material and because she imagined that it would necessary for future courses. She recalls how early in the course she established a relationship between Profeessor Achebe's notes/slides and the textbook:

> Betsy: So then I would take them [Achebe`s notes/slides]. Go back, and like reference them to the book, and see how the book was explaining them versus his explanations and things.

> Me: And what did you find?

> Betsy: I thought that his slides were, umm, like, over. I don`t know how to explain this, um, like kind of *overly simplifying things*. And sometimes he doesn't even, sometimes I

felt that he takes things like *too literally*. Like when I would ask questions, and I would

ask `ok, so is it this, or this?` He was like, `well, the book says this`. But that`s, the book

is even not explaining it. Or not explaining it in, uh, you know, in real terms … And

sometimes I just think that he reads things and then (pausing for effect) that`s it! Like

there! But he doesn't process it. *So he might just be telling you what it says, but not*

what it means necessarily. [my italics] [PD 162 43-48]

Thus while Betsy had serious reservations about the knowledge Professor Achebe was presenting

in class, she did not appear resentful, nor did she manifest the signs of the dissatisfied customer.

While she did not have a positive opinion of the course, this did not seem to entail a negative

attitude towards her experience or towards the instructor. Indeed earlier in the interview she

described Achebe and his course thus:

"Like he is incredibly literate, but a lot of things are lost in translation. Although I might

be able to understand what he was trying to say in a certain question. It might   be less, less

clear for others" [PD 162

Certainly Betsy was ambivalent. On the one hand, Achebe was reading "simplistically" or too

"literally", on the other hand he was "incredibly literate". Nonetheless, for the sake of doing

well in the course, she had to triangulate between what Achebe presented in class and the

textbook:

"Because sometimes his summaries weren't (pause) really sufficient. Like he would ask

        a question because he had the knowledge, being the teacher, but he would ask the

question in a certain way, but it wouldn't be covered necessarily in the notes. Or there

would be a better, more clear definition of it in the book. So I was kind of going back.

Like I would take his notes, print them out, and then go back and like kind of read the

sections that he was going over; because obviously, whatever he was typing on his slides

was going to be what was on the test." [PD 162

Yet in the final analysis, his testing did not inspire her to do her best. She admits that as the

course went on her reading "tapered off" as she realized she could think her way through to most

of the answers correctly.

> "I didn't, in all honesty, I probably didn't retain any of the knowledge because of the way that it was taught, because I really wasn't required to know anything in order to do well in the class. "[PD 162

She admitted that the more superficial approach to the course that she eventually took was eerily reminiscent of those prior learning experiences when she would just figure what she needed to do in order to pass. She recalled some of her approach to the textbook early in the course.

This was a marked contrast to the Western Civilization class Betsy also taking that term. In this course she felt she learned a lot, so much so that she was going to take a second western civilization class with the same professor next term. His exams had were 40% multiple choice and 60% essay. Yet again she found that multiple choice part of his exams were "ridiculously easy", when I asked her how it was that she found these questions easy she said,

> "I think that its because I have some like basic knowledge of the subject, some basic understanding of stuff." [PD 162

Indeed she said that she had "talked to a lot of other kids in the class and they had difficulty with multiple choice, but I felt it was like a free 40 points." His essays on the other hand were a different story. Betsy suggested that he was "looking" for some "specific things" and that you "really had to know your stuff" if you were going to do well on this part.

This history professor was one whom she concluded was "really knowledgeable." Initially, she had perceived him to be somewhat "pompous", but ultimately she reconciled herself to the fact that he simple "has a lot to say." In this class too, until the first test, she had read over everything entirely. Yet after his first test she realized that they were "150 percent on the lectures"; nonetheless, there was also a quality to his lectures and to the knowledge that he was presenting that somehow *superseded* the textbook, like the reference to a 150% might also suggest:

> "But, um like when I was like reading the text its like he is so knowledgeable that he is

literally talking, and it *is* the text. But that's how much he knows about it." (emphasis in original) [PD 162

This is a difficult claim to interpret. I should have pursued it further at the time. At the very least there is a sense that the history professor and his textbook are speaking the same language and that this is a sign of how knowledgeable the instructor is.

I was still curious as to how she found these multiple-choice questions so easy. And it was at this point that the high level of literacy and academic capital in Betsy's home was made explicit.   She simply answered, "My parents read a lot. and um I like to read too. So having, you could kind of figure things out" So, I asked her what do her parents read? She said,

"Everything! I mean, I mean that so literally (she giggles). In my parents home there are bookshelves lining every wall, in every single room, in a not-so-small house and they've read every single book on every one of those shelves." [PD 162

At that point I asked what her parents did for a living. Her mother was a paralegal, though she was both a journalism and a literature major in college. Her father works for the phone company and was history major in college. Both parents have bachelor's degrees, and had met while attending private liberal arts college in New York.

She says that,

"My dad's like the smartest person I know, and my mom, she's really smart too. She did a lot of things. She's a paralegal now like I said which has nothing to do with her degree, but she did use to work for a newspaper she   was a journalist for a while. She worked for the UN for a while, because she speaks, she lived in France for a long time and speaks so, she translated and did a lot of different things for the UN." [PD 162

When I asked her what sort of aspirations she thought her parents had for her, she said,

"My mom just wants me to be, I guess. My mom wants me to be successful. And my dad doesn't care, he just wants me to be happy. My dad is a musician. He's happy, if I am happy" [PD 162

Again trying to reconcile all of the different images of Betsy, at one point when she was discussing how growing up in her extended family was "pretty awesome". I asked,

Me: And yet you had to get out at the same time?

Betsy: Yeah, its just cuz I wanted to travel. It wasn't my family. I *love* my family. I am very close to them. Just a big, Irish family. And, um, I' really close to them. I just um, I just wanted to see more things [PD 162

Eventually it also came out that MXCC was not exactly the closest of the community colleges to her house. There was one other that was slightly closer; however, she depends on her son's grandmother (father's mother) for day care and she lives much closer to MXCC. Between work, daycare, classes and home, MXCC was the more "sane" choice. Finally, towards the very end of our interview, I advised her to consider a program I had recently come across for community college students to attend a prestigious private liberal arts college in the state.

Raven' course taking experience

Everyone just called her Raven, at least that's what she told me. Like Betsy, she too plans to be a teacher; unlike Betsy, she sold back her textbook three weeks into the class. A self-confessed 24-year old Wiccan who routinely came to class all dressed in baggy black clothes, the nickname seemed to fit. When I met Raven when she was in her first semester at NECC. In addition to *Principles of Sociology*, she was taking her English Composition 101 requirement, a Digital Graphic Arts, class, an Early Childhood Education course, and a night class in Psychology. She was enrolled in the the Early Childhood Education:

Raven was certain she wanted to be a kindergarten teacher. She says its been one of her goals since she was 12 years old. Every summer, as far back as she can remember, she had

worked as a camp counselor. She offers frank assessment of how much more enjoyable it is to work with younger aged children than with high school aged kids:

" … [B]ut when you work with little kids they are so eager to do whatever it is you tell them to do. I mean, I`m not going to tell them to do something crazy and stupid, but they are more eager to listen to you and to please you, whereas if you are working with High School kids they, they are more likely to tell you, I'm not doing what you tell me to do. You can go' F 'yourself. So, I would much rather go work with children that are eager to learn and actually want to be there and are having fun, because then I think that I would feel like I am making more of a difference in their lives, educationally, than I would if I am sitting with a room full of teenagers that are just talking trash, back-talking and not paying any attention to what I am doing. I would then kind of feel that my efforts were, like I'm wasting my time." [PD 98 011]

On one level, her interest in education is curiously ironic. She has never really had positive experiences with formal instruction. The reasons for this are numerous, varied and complex. She confesses that her family's SES, and the fact that she is very overweight, combined to make schooling an often toxic experience for her.

Me: Tell me about you as a student, going all the way back to elementary school.

Raven; I didn't like school, like I hated school!

Me: What, even in Kindergarten? Why, why did you hate it then?

Raven: Because, even in kindergarten. Because um, I've always had weight issues. So I was always the kid that, you know, the fat kid on the playground. And um … I grew up in Ludlow, which is kind of, a bit of a snobby town. Not as snobby as others, cuz its obviously not one of the richer towns, but it is more of an upper middle class town. So there was a lot of you had that snobbiness. 'My parents make more money than your parents', or 'Your're not good enough to hang out with me kind of thing .. um ... A lot of the parents did not want their children socializing with the lower class kids from Holden, which my family   was! My family has always struggled financially; pay-check to pay check, kind of thing. We've been struggling in the house we live in now. We wonder if

we're going to have a roof over our head next month. In the house we've lived for the last two years, I don't think we've ever paid our rent on time once. And we've lived where we've lived for two years now" [PD 98 62-67]

Home life for Raven is toxic -- much of it on account of her relationships with her mom and sister. In a rare piece of understatement, she says, "My mom and I don't really get along very well. Mom just kind of goes her way, and I kind of go mine." In fact, Raven claims to want nothing more than to flee her mother's home and to get out of paying her rent to stay for the"-in-law apartment", something she's had to do since she turned 18. "I wish I could afford to not be living in my mothers house, because if I could afford to be, I wouldn't be. I would be far, far, far away". [PD :98 039].

Yet even if given that opportunity, things might not be so simple, as now there is a 4-year old boy in the equation. According to Raven, she and her mom are the primary caretaker for her younger sisters child.

"Well it's real funny though, because I'm the one who pays rent, but my younger sister, who has a four year old, doesn't have to pay a dime, but meanwhile my mother and I are the ones who are taking care of the 4 year old, while my sister is playing video games, and playing on the computer, and drinks. The whole big family dramatic situation" [PD 98: 44]

Her sister was 16 when she got pregnant, just one more sign to Rave of her younger sisters stupidity. She mocks her sister when she had said she didn't think she could get pregnant, and berates her for not taking contraception.

"I think that what aggravated me the most about the situation, she didn't even use any protection, like she didn't even try to prevent the pregnancy. At 16-years old, I *know* you sat through health ed. class, and I *know* that you know what a condom is, and I know that you know how to use one, and I know that they have taken those bananas and shown you how to use them in school. So there is absoloutely no excuse why you can't say, 'mom I want to go on the pill, go to the store and buy a condom…" 051

Of course, when Nellie had the baby a lot change. According to Raven, they lost their home in Holden to foreclosure because her mom, who had been working at a hotel , "kept taking time off to bring 'Nellie' to the doctors' appointments, to you know for the pre-natal care and all that. So she ended up getting fired because of it" [PD 98: 071]. She recalls how early on, she thought her anger would never subside.

> "I was *very* mad when it happened. `I`m not going to have anything to do with the baby`, I`m not going to hold it. I`m not going to pick it up. I`m not going to go anywhere near it. I swore up and down. `I wouldn't touch it."

Having got that off her chest, she smiled, as if recognizing the onset of wisdom born of pain, as if such anger could not be projected on to an 'innocent', she conceded, `Well, that's not going to last`. As it stands now, according to Raven, she is spending even more time with the baby boy than her sister does. Essentially, she paints her sister as hopeless, without even a modiucm of "common sense." Indeed there is a bit of running joke about her between her and her stepfather, where they both 'throw their hands up' in resignation, sighing, "you cant' fix stupid.' –a line she says from Ron White's*, 'Blue Collar Comedy Tour'*.

When Raven was 4 years-old her biological father jumped from a nearby interstate overpass and committed suicide. Yet it is with her step-father that she seems to have her most enjoyable relationship. She certainly respects how he, and his work for a major gun manufacturing company "making decent enough money", is what pays for most of what they have and what they do. Nonetheless, she says, "right now we are completely living off his paycheck week to week". At present their home seems a bit of a fragile ecosystem; the car is on the fritz and they can`t afford to take care of it, in fact they`ve been forced to use Nellie`s boyfriend`s car, but it too is having problems. Indeed were it not for the work-study and Pell grant she received (though not without its own share bureaucratic borne anxieties) she would not have had the money for college.

If she never really enjoyed school, it was also was something she never really excelled at either. She remembers that her academic troubles surfaced somewhere between elementary and middle school.

"Early on, when I was probably 5th and 6th grade, its where I was really, it was just like, 'I'm not getting this stuff ... (pause) this stuff is not easy for me. I'm more of a hands on learner. Like I learn better by doing." [PD:98 107].

Indeed this may have been why her mother chose to send her to one of the area`s charter high schools. Raven attended to one of the longest running environmental charter schools in the nation. The school, *Terra Firma*, advertises itself as a "High School, Urban Farm and Environmental Education Center" where "you can plant seeds. You can change lives. You can grow leaders". Their own data suggests that their students 80% people of color, approximately 70% come from the inner city and 60% qualify for free and reduced lunch. Raven blames much her current academic challenges on her "moms" decision to send her here, to what she believes turned out to be a substandard high school. According to Raven, her mom had thought it would be a place with less drugs than the high school she would have otherwise attended. Raven explains,

"Its a high school on a farm, in the middle of the woods … we didn't have real math classes, so I scored horribly low on my entrance test; so I have to start at the very bottom--Math 75! Couldn`t even get to 95 or 104, had to start at the very, very bottom class.. [however] I learned how to roof, and how to build a shed, and build a fence…"[her sarcasm undisguised] [PD:98 29-30]

This high school experience eventually led her to Archway Community College, where she spent 2 semesters as a "business major" before dropping out, which coincided with the time that her sister got pregnant. She says her parents simply could no longer afford to send her. Even before that however knowing her parents true financial situation, she had never even bothered to apply to a "real" school. Institutional choice aside, it is also true that fitting into any educational institution has been a challenge, both academically and socially.

"In terms of growing-up, and being in school. I never (pause) I was always more of an outsider than anything else. I, I`ve never really had friends that I (pause) I

still, to this day, don't have a social circle in school that I, you know, have people that I leave school and go hang out with, or when I call them up and 'hey, let's go to Karaoke', like go do whatever it is, like, like. I never had that kind of relationship, and I think that's why school was always somewhere I never really wanted to be, because always felt like I was an outsider and I didn' fit in." [PD 98:083]

That said, *Principles of Sociology* is perhaps Raven's most "favorite" class, and Achebe, one of the best teachers she has ever had. Because she says she "learns better by doing" and because she is not very good at taking notes, Achebe's use of power point slides is something she very much appreciates. Indeed, according to Raven what separates Achebe is not so much his use of PowerPoints, but how he uses them. In fact, she compares his use of slides to the way her psychology professor uses his. Apparently this class also employs power point slides extensively, however this professor will stray from them, going off on "tangents", often around "personal life stories" , ultimately even downplaying the slides, even telling the students on occasion to "ignore" them. This class made Raven increasingly frustrated and anxious. She had no idea what she should be getting down in her notes; moreover, no sooner does she fixate on something to get down, then the professor would be off again, and onto another subject. Compared to Achebe, Raven was uncomfortable with the relative value the psychology professor seemed to to place on the lecture and the concomitant inferior value placed on the PowePoint slides. Even when she is describing her psychology professor`s use of slides, she (like him she assumes) dismisses their significance for this class: "but like in my psychology class, everything is lecture."

In addition to having the task of note taking made significantly easier, if not removed altogether, Raven also appreciated how Achebe`s slides not only represented the entirety of the course content, but that this content was essentially repeated several times in several places. I asked her about how the notes Professor Achebe provided via Blackboard online, differed from the power point slides he presented in class, in *essence* she said, they do not:

"Sometimes [the two differ], in the order that is, but it`s the *same information*. And its

given to us three different ways. He gives it to us. He has `lecture` notes, `important notes` and then a `chapter summary`. And then you can print off the power points themselves. So technically you can have, like the power points themselves and then 3 different ways. So, in total. the notes are given to you 4 times. So I mean really…"
[PD:98 148]

The "really" here, was *not* sarcastic, but an effort to emphasize that Professor Achebe has gone to extreme lengths to ensure that the information get transmitted to you.

Clearly quite a tangle of thoughts and feelings emerge from her experiences in psychology class, critically what did not emerge however was any set of notes she felt comfortable studying from for and exam. By contrast, in Achebe`s class, having a sense for what was coming next, was an undeniable experience, if not an intentional aspect of the course`s design.

"With professor Achebe I feel that his PowerPoints, like his lecture, really are straight from the power point. So even if I, you know (pause) don't write down everything that he says, I feel that as long as I write down everything thats on the powerpoint, its still good enough, where like I, I, I understand and I'm studying well. And, I don`t feel lost."
[PD:98 119]"

Or even more succinctly she later reiterates,

"…   because I have everything printed and organized in my my binder, and I'm all set. Its all right there, like for me to study before each exam."

She also contrasts Professor Achebe`s respectful and routine testing schedule, to that of her English professor, who had changed the length and the due date of a paper while the students were well into the class.  Of course, there are no papers in Achebe`s class, which perhaps helps account for its level of predictability that Raven takes as exceptional. She says, "Nothing was ever just like thrown at you. And I just feel like, *that's* what makes a good professor."

Thus with the over overweening significance of the slides in this class, the textbook receded in importance. Indeed, when I asked Raven if she had read the text, she laughed somwhat bashfully then confessed, "I sold mine back already" [PD 98: 149]. At this point the class still had a close to a month left. Its not that she had never cracked the book, in fact at the beginning of the course, she had had started to read it. However, once she recognized that the textbook was entirely absent from the tests, and that the tests were entirely based on the slides

> "…I just kind of let my textbook sit on a shelf, and I just never really bothered to really look through it again. *Because* after taking two of his tests, and seeing, *wow*, everything like, is *directly*, like what is *in* my notes. I was like; I don`t really feel I have to read it." [PD 98: 158]

Alas when she did read the textbook she recalled no compelling reading experiences with it." like any other textbook, you know, (pause) they are not fun to read! They are books for school" [PD:98 158]. And there were no real compelling reasons to search the textbook for explanations or guidance as she points out "I think like he does a pretty good job of explaining everything in class. So I don`t normally feel like, lost, after one of his classes [PD:98 146]. In the end for Raven, Professor Achebe was second to none, largely because, as she puts it, "I just feel he gives you everything you need to really do well." [PD 98: 123-125]

Sanders Class

Julie's course taking experience

Julie was a petite 20-year old bubbly young woman with short dark hair of Polish Cuban decent. She never said anything in class, but when interviewed she spoke as if she'd been un-corked. Words flew from her mouth, some emphasized, some whispered and whole groups of them punctuated by sound effects and giggles. Julie had numerous contradictions working through her life. For example, though she confessed to being averse to conflict, she also wanted me to know that she was feisty, that she wasn't "afraid" to express her opinions, and that at 5 foot 2 many have told her that she's like a "small dog" who just never knew they were small.

Three weeks into the semester and Julie had serious reservations about the course. Even though she had taken Sociology in high school, she felt at sea in Sander's class, the responsibility for which she put squarely at feet. About his class she said,

> "It's not, *not* interesting. It *is* interesting, but um. I think it's based on the teacher. I think he, he talks a lot! And a lot of it is not even about the course itself. And what he says is still kind of, semi-interesting (she giggles), but uh. … Cuz then he'll give you a quiz, and then he's like, 'All right, you need to know this stuff'. And kind of along the way he doesn't tell you much of anything, and then just plops something down in front of you. And you're like 'oh, huh, ok' (acting surprised)". PD 171; 32-34

In spite of having a textbook to offer coherence, Julie experienced the class as a rambling lecture built on random anecdotes and punctuated with equally random quizzes.

> "He'll start to make a point and they and then he'll just, *whiffff*, then go away, 'off-topic', and then start talking about that. And then the next thing you know, 'now where does that connect with what you were just talking about?' PD: 171; 040

And in an interview with Julie at the very beginning of the next semester, it was clear that she had come to lose any sense that the subject itself was inherently interesting and at the prospect of taking another sociology course she said, "I think I am sociologied out" 130

Julie considered herself an "average student", somewhat of a slacker, a habitual procrastinator, who simply did not "push herself enough". She had no doubts about to her capacity to understand academic content, but she had very little confidence in her ability to focus on things she was not interested in.

> "School work was never really a struggle for me, the worst part was just that I never wanted to do it, I wanted to do other things"

She tried to compensate by approaching learning tasks (along with many other things in life) as if she'd been dared to complete them.   About any classroom assignment she said, "I do it, to say I did it, then move on to something that [was] more interesting." Ultimately, Julie received a "B plus" in the Sociology class[225].

When I met Julie she was taking Math, 2-Dimensional Art, Creative Writing, Philosophy and Sociology. It was her third consecutive term (and second year) at NECC and she intended to transfer to a four-year college. Straight out of high school she had applied to the nearby regional public university, but was rejected because her "slacker" [106] high school had only forwarded "half" of her transcripts.   She had started to contest the whole matter, but once it started getting a little more confrontational and bureaucratic she decided it wasn't worth the effort; she took it as a sign, and decided to go to NECC instead. Going to NECC would allow her to "get her prerequisites out of the way" and to "save money". Moreover, in the absence of any precise sense of what she wanted to do with her life, she figured that going here was the right thing to do. "I needed to straighten things out with myself first, I needed to like, at least get a feel for what I want to do" [108].

She seemed to have some residual antipathy towards her high school guidance counselor, who offered no clear college "guidance" whatsoever.   While all questions that Julie put to her were apparently "good questions", they were never followed with definitive answers. She recalled receiving praise for her academic achievements, but never a sense for what they meant with for college. Julie and her mom had in fact discussed college early on in Julie's high school career; however, as her mother had only attended night school for a single semester, it was not something she felt she could help very much with. Julie recalled how they decided it was simply a "bridge [they'd] have cross when [they] got to it".

What perhaps made Sander's examples seem so "off-topic" was how they were often drawn from his own experiences.   Again, once the course was over, her opinions if anything became more strident. I asked if she that feeling at sea in all of this might been on account that there was "too much information" in the class[226].   She vehemently disagreed.

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225 At the very beginning of the next terms she said that she got B pluses and A minuses in all of her courses, she could not remember which one was the case for the Sociology course.

226 I asked her about if she felt she could distinguish "in any way" between the *symbolic interactionist*, the *conflict* and the *functionalist* perspectives, perhaps the single most unifying theme in the entire textbook, but she could not. She did offer to make up definitions on the spot. Her definitions were literal and simple common sense understandings of the terms. I asked if perhaps she "thought that the information

"Too much! He talked about his children! I could write his own biography for him. I know his life. Oh man! (in disbelief). I just feel like he. I feel like the way he approached the whole class kind of, was not right. I feel like he just walked in, 'what am I going to talk about today? Uh, I don't know. uh, 'There you go.' -then branch of into something random that makes no sense to anybody (pause) and then give test.".

According to Julie, Sander's propensity to go "off-topic", and thus willingness cover only "half "a chapter's material, was based on his assumption that students were coming to class already having read the textbook,

"…[H]e'll tell us to read the chapter, and for me I'll start to read it. I can read. And then next thing you know I'll close the book and I don't know what I just read; because, after a while, I start to lose interest. And I need somebody to *tell* me about it, instead of just *reading* about it.   And that's basically what he does -- He has you read it, and expects you to know it, and then talks about other things" [her emphasis] 037

She lamented the absence of very many group discussions or exercises. And though some did in fact occur early in the semester as the semester wore on they seemed to disappear.

"There were a few areas that were kind of controversial ... I feel like, you could have had, like there were a few discussions that kind of bubbled up, but there could have been *so* many more if he had given us more information, and more, like *leadership* [he emphasis] 82-84

At the very least, Julie believed not only that the course did not entail enough discussion, opportunities for discussion were actually missed.

Julie might have been even more upset about her experience in the course were it not for the fact that she received apparently acceptable grades. However in her estimation the course

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in the class was too much

was above all designed to deliver high grades.

> " … he kind of just outlines everything for you to begin with. He doesn't really talk about much in class, but then he will tell you exactly what's on the test; cuz he wants you to do well. ... And then he tells you at the beginning of the semester that there is going to be a paper due and then drops little hints in the middle, and you're good to go, if you do it. Even if you do it like a week before, you are fine. I did it in like three days. Not even. 016-019 021

In this context, the textbook was superfluous. Moreover, for Julie, who came to regard the course as something to be endured, and with its significance reduced to the grade she received persisting.

> "…[B]asically reading the book wasn't important, and going to class wasn't even that important, except to hear what was going to be on the test, 51

And if the tests were handed to the students on a platter, their corrections were no less generous. Indeed she does not even describe the tests as assessments of content.

> "Circle answers and then just write. And that's what all his tests were like, and they really were not that difficult. So once you figure out that the tests aren't difficult. You don't hand in any homework. To him, you don't really particip, class participation, I mean you can raise your hand and say something once in a while, but I mean, pause, there's no real reason to."

In fact she told me a story about how one of her friends in the class who had used her cell phone to cheat, providing answers to the test that were close to verbatim from the textbook, and yet they received roughly the same grades. About Sander's grading she said, "he would give me points if it sounded close", 62

From Juile's prespecitve, Sanders' approach to grading was reflected in the superficial way she herself answered his essay questions.

"Most of the time I will start out with one way of talking about something and then halfway through the middle I have like this (chkkeeew!) thought, of like, 'maybe its this'! So I'll just stop, and start writing all over again, and then I'll leave it. 'You can pick which one I am talking about' (giggles)" 64

She is not exactly proud of her unwillingness to seek coherence in the answers she provides, and she recognizes it as a bad habit from her past. However, it has worked in the past, and it appears to be working again in Sanders' course.

Julie's mother is apparently a feisty "go-getter" herself. A half-inch shorter than Julie, she used to race motorcycles and was one of the first women to do so against men. Now she is East Salem's city's assessor. According to Julie, people come into her office fuming mad barely holding it together once they've found that their taxes have gone up, while her mom, all 5 foot 1 and half inches of her "walks up to the counter" and dispatches them and their aggression, such that they in turn they leave "with their tail between their legs".

Her father also used to be an assessor, but according to Julie, quit one day and decided be a truck driver. Essentially he bought a truck, learned how to drive it, and has been driving ever since. Julie says her father went to college, but she doesn't really know any of the details, just that it was in Florida. The picture she paints of her father is very complicated and contradictory; an extremely bright and "very giving" man with a temper. "He's one of those MENSA's, you know, if you're really smart." To hear Jamie speak, the man's intelligence is without limit and matched only by his daring. He used to "fly planes, jump out of planes … taught people how to fly them". Indeed when she feels trapped in studies she's not engaged in, she identifies with him. And yet there is a darker side to him as well:

"My dad he's a really good guy, but at the same time, he has a bad temper, gets really mean like sometimes. I think its because, he has diabetes, he drinks one night and then next day he explodes"

Until one day in the 8th grade, a day she "always knew was coming", had finally arrived. Her father was on one of his yearly golf trips in the Bahamas, and right after he departed,

" [M]y mom comes, looks at me and she goes, Julie we're moving .
So I said ok. And then that was like the extent of the conversation.
And she as looking at me like she didn't know what I was going to do, if I was to cry, if
I was going to be ok, or whatever.

Me-- if you understood?

Julie: Right and so she says it to me and I just said, ok, and I'm looking at her now.
'Should I start packing now?' (giggles). And she was like 'Yes'!

"So now, he comes back, and I'm like, 'Mom, I'm going to die! My heart is going to
fail. I'm going to die. Dad's coming home. He doesn't know what's going on. You
bought a new house. He doesn't know about the other house. He doesn't know that we
have moved out. PD172 73-78

Julie has a very complicated and ambivalent relationship with her father. On the one
hand she cannot express enough how intelligent and "giving" he is. However she recalls what it
was like when they all lived together in the same house.

"He's got like a really bad temper on top of everything, so when we were living there it
was like walking around on egg shells. Cuz you never knew what was going to make
him explode. It was always really random".

She also recollects from that fateful day (and as a bit of a non-sequitor within our own
conversation) the precise moment when her father learned that the family had moved out.
According to Julie her father was initially confused and her mom perhaps horrified at his
confusion, "So when am *I* moving ut? And my mom had this look on her face, like 'What? No,
you stay, we're going!.'"
According to Julie, her father had just assumed that the tiny run down house that her
mom had just purchased was for him and that he just assumed that they would remain in the

original house.

> I mean this was like the big house, the nice house, all the nice stuff ...
> And I think he only assumed that; even though he was always, um very mean, or
> whatever, you know, testy, and all that kind of stuff, he always gave us the best of things.
> You know he always gave us really nice gifts, and did really nice things and that's what
> made it so difficult for them to be divorced. Its because, even though he could be a jerk,
> he 's very, very sweet and would do anything and everything for you .... So he was
> automatically thinking 'this house is obviously the nicer house, you guys stay here and Ill
> go there.' PD 172 .87-89

> (perhaps that part where she wonders as her father looks at the picture of the dilapidated
> house he forced them into)

When I met Julie, she was living with her mother, as she had been since that fateful day.
Her father lives 10 minutes and her parents still see one another all the time. "its "kind of like my
parents are just dating".

> "My mom and I moved out. Not a lot of people know that. Everything. 1411 Durham
> Road they all say where we live. No one at her work knows that they are separated, and
> my high school couldn't know because if they knew that I lived somewhere else they
> would make me switch schools. So we kept a really big secret for a long time" [072]

And keeping her secret, was not easy.   She recalled how certain friends or acquaintances whom
she could necessarily trust were visiting, she was expected to feign living in her father's house.

> "It was hard. My friends were like, 'Oh, can I come over? ' And it would be like the
> ones I really trusted. I'd let them come over, and the other ones would be like, 'alright
> apparently I'm living here for the day'."

However for all of the anxieties, secrecy and chaos of those days, perhaps their most palpable manifestation came in the form a very bad boy friend experience the next year. Julie described her sophomore year in high school through the very beginning of her junior year as regrettably having been define by a boy. The relationship was damaging, emotionally, physically and academically. Besides being a "real jerk",

> "He was very like, mentally abusive, saying things that were always really *mean,* and just being *really* mean, and it was just like *horrible,* and I don't know why I stayed."

As if to sum it all up she said, he " just brought me down". Julie was stressed all the time:

> "I didn't really have any friends at that point it was just kind of him, and who he was friends with."

Her stomach was upset continuously over the situation; she felt she couldn't' eat without throwing up, and so lost lost quite a bit of weight. As a petite 4 foot 8 high school girl, she too laughed when she acknowledged the obvious, that she just didn't have the mass to afford losing any weight. According to Julie,

> "He would say mean things all the time: 'you look stupid '; 'you look ugly'; 'you're not pretty', stuff like that, *a lot.* And I'd be like, thanks. And like act like it didn't bother me, when when I got home that's what I'd be thinking about."

Julie's grades dropped down precipitously that year.

> "And that"s when I'm like I cant do this. I need to be like studying really hard if I want to go to a college. These are the grades they are going to look at blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Instead I am bringing home D's and C's, F's and stuff like that".

Her mother knew that it was because of the boy friend, and though they usually shared everything, for reasons Julie still could not quite explain, she couldn't bring herself to discuss the

matter with her. At this point the best she can come up with is that she did not want to upset her.

> "She knew it was because of him, but every time she tried to talk to me. I was, not in denial, but just like, 'I can handle it'. 'I can handle it'. That's like my mental state anyway. You don't have to help me, cuz I can do it on my own"

Apparently the boyfriend "cheated" on her and she had known if for a long time. He would confront her, but he would spin it around on her and say it was her fault for not trusting him. She knew never believed him and one day even against her anti-confrontational instincts she called him on the phone, told him what she thought of him, said don't ever call me back and hung up the phone.

Julie reflected often on her experiences during those times and even now they still don't quite add up. She still does not entirely understand why she stayed so long with the boy, or why she tried to keep so much of this from her mother. As for the former, in part she brushes it off with a sarcastic, "yeah, great taste in men!" Yet part of her wonders whether she could done have this out of spite. A girl who knew both Julie and her boyfriend and told he she though they would never last. Julie wonders if she could have stuck it just to prove the girl wrong.

Proving people wrong is a powerful force in Julie's life.   Regardless of its origins exactly she relates to her relationship with her father. In particular, she admits to having been a very small and even "sickly" child "no one thought I was going to grow over 4 foot 8. " Her father on the other hand was 6 foot 5, 250 pounds and constantly telling her she couldn't do things. On the one hand, she is angered at having been belittled, but on the other she understands him as having had difficulty with her seeming so frail, wanting both to shield her and to toughen her up at the same time. Still, she strongly identifies with his physicality, and often feels that course work is its antithesis, something she want to "bust" out of.   Nonetheless, proving her father wrong were some of the more satisfying and memorable moments from her childhood.

Finally, she also strongly identifies with her equally diminutive mother. Indeed, she understands why it took her mother so long to leave her father, suggesting that when it comes to her father, it is almost impossible not to be torn. She explain's her father and her mother's predicament thus:

"He's very protective and while he gives you the impression that you are a jerk. You're an idiot, and he says all those mean things about you, he makes it sound like he, he, almost doesn't love you by what he says, you know that he would get hit by a train to save you. And you know that he would do anything for you. So that's what makes it so difficult. Because if he was so harsh and mean and rude like that all the time, then it would be a no brainer."

Julie had also taken a sociology course in high school, but the instructor who taught it, also taught psychology (the instructor's true area of expertise). Hence as interesting as that class may have been, she did not feel as if she understood what sociology was. Alas, after taking *Principles of Sociology* at NECC, she felt no further in her understanding. She found his class exceedingly "boring" 63-65 and bereft of any knowledge useful she can articulate.

"Its not even like because he is a bad guy, its just like its cause. Its like I didn't learn *anything*. I just didn't learn anything. So it's almost like I paid money to take this class, but I didn't even need to take it, it's not doing anything for me".

And in a tone she would not likely to have used while still taking the course itself she concludes:

"Its not like you dislike him, or you want to be like harsh, and like 'ah this stupid teacher! " But it's more like, stupid teacher for not linking things together: you know, your homework with your, what you 're supposed to be learning. It was more like, you know you got some great advice, you got some really good stories, you're a really nice guy, you are a positive person in general, but when it comes to Sociology, you should not open your mouth …"

It should be said that some her misgivings about Sander's sociology course emerge out of the positive experiences she had in his History course the term previously! Indeed, this helped set some of her expectations for the course, and inevitably framed her disappointments. Ultimately the contrasts between Sander's the History instructor, and Sanders the Sociology instructor were just too glaring. When I asked Julie his Sociology course compared to other

classes she had taken at NECC, she answered strictly with respect to his History course.

> "I feel like the history class is more of his style of teaching. He would pull down maps and give you handouts and things like that. In this class he was just kind of like, ehhh, kind of just talking. Didn't really give you any handouts. If he told you to open the book, you really didn't actually have to open the book. Because there wasn't really anything specific that you were looking at that you didn't (pause) hear. Do you know what I am saying?"

For the sake of efficiency and one's grades, the concern was to strike a balance between paying attention to lecture, taking notes and reading the textbook. Yet there was an irony implicit in how she approached textbooks between the two classes. In Sociology where Sanders expected you to read the text, for the sake of your grades, you didn't really need to; in History where there was decidedly less focus on the textbook, it could nonetheless prove relevant and helpful. According to Julie, in Sociology,

> "… he would expect you to read it, and then come in, and know about it, but no one did any of that. And you really didn't even need to buy the book in the first place. But for History, if you like skimmed it, you didn't actually have to really read, read, but if you just went over the chapter and then went into class. He really laid things out (and that was a three hour class) … If you took really good notes, um, you wouldn't do bad on the test. If you just studied your notes, you'd do fine on the tests, on the final, on the midterm, you'd do fine on everything …. If you didn't look at your notes, if you didn't skim the chapter (cuz I didn't always do that) you would still do fine, if you really paid attention. Like I knew if I didn't really look at even part of the chapter and I just went into class that I would really have to pay attention to what he was saying.

In marked contrast to her experiences in Sociology, the History lectures at least constituted a coherent narrative that paralleled (though not always precisely) coherent textbook. Julie continued her comparison from above:

"Because if you zone out [in the History class] which is easy to do, if you zone out, and you don't pay attention, its, its. You get lost. Because when he then goes the next time to talk about things, you think he is going to talk about the next chapter, but really he starts from the end of the one before, or wherever he left off" 031-035.

Similarly,

"At least in History he would be talking about something, that had to do with something else, that had to do with something else, that had to do with something else, if you're not paying attention you're going to lose it, and you're not going to understand that way".

The notes she took in his History class were relevant to his tests. In Sociology however rarely bothered to even take notes.

" … And I feel like he kind of just wasted time, almost. Because I feel like at the end of the day, you were, I was not taking notes. I just sat there the whole class, and stared at the wall.

Me: But in the History class you felt like you had to?

Jamie: Well right, because he was going over really specific information …

In point of fact Julie offered to show me her history notebook so that I could compare it to the one she used in sociology -- the former she maintained was filled "cover to cover"; both "back side of the page" and "front side of the page" were covered in notes. The sociology notebook on the other hand was presumably a conspicuous contrast.

Though she felt at sea in class, with just too many things appearing to be random, and no clear image of the discipline emerging, Julie stipulated that if she did have a question, one that was truly burning inside her, she would not hesitate to ask. However, she felt that to ask a question in class, to take her own confusions seriously, would be to open a can of worms. Essentially, she imagined one question would lead to another and then another and to another,

and because Sanders had fundamentally deviated from the textbook anyway, there was little point.

"I guess sometimes I felt if I were really paying attention at what he is talking about … and I feel like he is missing a point or something, I feel like if I were to raise my hand and ask a question about where he is getting that from, or whatever the question is, I feel like I would have so many other questions. Because if I actually read that chapter, and listened to what he was saying, nothing would really make sense, because he wouldn't even be talking about the chapter… It would end, "blehehehehhh" (sound of vomit) it would be like a projectile question at him " 045-049

It should be said that this is a perspective that Julie arrived at, after having taken the course. While she had very similar misgivings but three weeks into the course, she was also more positive And though she admitted to not always being engaged in his lectures, focusing on the textbook itself could occasionally "help":

"If he's talking about something in the book and he gives you a page, and I open it up to where he is talking and I read that, and then I listen to him, that actually helps" 055

When I interviewed Julie at the beginning of her 4th semester at NECC, her Sociology experience receding in memory, the balance between positive and negative learning experiences seemed to be shifting. Her capacity for "getting it over with" seemed to be waning. When I first met her she was certain she would graduate. She said as much, unequivocally and unreservedly[227]. After Principles of Sociology (and the other classes that term) she did not suggest that she was no longer looking to transfer, but she strongly suggested that persisting was taking its toll on her.

"Me: Tell me a little bit more about how you are feeling about school this term as

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[227] Also contrary to our earlier interviews, "interesting" as being art therapist may sound in the abstract, somehow it doesn't quite seem exciting enough. On the other hand she has discovered that doing Community service is exciting and she had decided to begin exploring careers in Social Work.

compared to last term.

Jamie: Oh man, I-JUST-DONT-WANT-TO-DO –IT!

Me: But you've done it for so long. This is term number four!

Jamie: Right! -(pause) uhhhhhh –(mock scream). Cuz, I figured by now I'd be on my way out, but instead, instead, its like I got to be stuck here for another semester, taking MORE classes that I really don't care about! Yes! I am not psyched! I just want to bbbbbust right through it! "

Max's course taking experience

When I first interviewed Max he was a 24-year old squad leader in the Marines, 8 months from being shipped off to Afghanistan and according to Max, a typical sociology class with Professor Sanders went as follows:

> "So it will be 45 minutes of just *stories*, and you know, his background; and 20 minutes of me taking some notes … 20 minutes of actual stuff from the book. But I guess it's pretty much interesting, how he can pretty much relate everything in the book to his life" PD151 17 [my italics]

For better or for worse, Sander's "stories" were an inescapable focal experience of the course. I caught up with Max for another interview 2 months after the course had finished, to see what sort of imprint all of those stories might have left. Perhaps it was the familiarity we already shared, or maybe because I had started our interview with an off –putting question, but when I asked Max, "Do you think you learned a lot in that sociology class?", he convulsed in laughter, as if I was taking as possible the patently impossible.   Once the laughter died down, he confessed that the class nonetheless did have its merits

Max: I mean, I got a better way, you know, of looking, you know, at general life, I guess, and a little bit of different perspective. I found it interesting enough where I probably learned more I did than in the rest of my classes. Just by

Me: Oh really? Few have made that claim.

Max: His, I mean, I mean none of the classes that I really take have been all that challenging, to be honest with you. But you know at the same time, whereas his, you know, stories and stuff would get to be too much sometimes, you know, and everything with his life experience. He's still an intelligent man that made things like, you know, easy to follow, you know. He might have been a little too easy, you know on us, and stuff. The way things are graded, blah, blah, blah, and what was expected. But I don't know; at the same time; I don't know, I had a good experience with it, I guess. You know, for the most part. Over all. Satisfied -- more satisfied than I am with any of the classes I am taking this semester

Max always sat in the front row. Tall, athletic with dirty blond-hair, he occasionally wore short-sleeved shirts and all of us behind him could see the *Semper Fidelis* tattooed along the back of his arm. With 5-years in the military, and several tours of duty in Iraq already under his belt, Max felt older than his peers; indeed he affected a gravity and purpose that, even to me seemed, well beyond his 24 years. That said, coming to NECC was part of a new chapter in his life, or as he put it, "I am trying to get my life really started, that's why I am here" [152: 045].

Max was an astonishingly self-reflective young man. As for his perspective on the military, he had come a long way since he too was admittedly a 'motard.'— or 'motivated-retard', a term usually reserved younger Marines. By the time I met him he was trying to put the military and his years atop a tank manning a machine gun behind him. He wanted nothing more to do with Marines, and there was no "fucking way" that his kids ever would either. Nothing about combat itself deflated him, but the stupidity and nastiness of his immediate superiors was something he could no longer take.

"But because it's the military they can *really*, *really* shit on you. Cuz you can't say a word if you are lower rank. … Just because you are a staff sergeant and I'm a corporal doesn't mean you have to be a dick to me?" PD 173- 11-17

Max was fed up with serving under small -minded, verbally abusive 'superiors', people he knew he was much smarter than. He dreamt of a day when he would bump into his commanding officer, but as a civilian. He explained, that in this situation, the roles would be reversed, as any one in the military is technically lower than a civilian.

Max was notable (both to himself and to me) for the critical perspective he sought on both his time in the Marines and on the factors that led him to be in the military in the first place. As part of that self- reflection, he wondered if the

"… military is totally different from what it used to be ... even 20 years ago. Just because of how society has been as a whole -- just getting so impersonal and materialistic, so on and so forth, a snowballing effect. Well it's going to go into the military too. You know its just like any company you might work for, the higher-ups, you know, they've been there longer, they make more money, or they are higher in rank, so they just shit on you. … You know back then [the '50s or 60s' he imagining] it's like, 'how's the wife and kids', or, 'how are you doing, alright now you got to go do this' Now its just like what the fuck, blah, blah, blah, screaming, or totally impersonal" 173- 11-17

Whether or not it is true that previous generations of commanding officers commanded with greater civility is an open question. However, Max's efforts to place his life's decisions within larger, non-obvious contexts was at the very least, an obvious element of his skill set.

In the end his hopes for getting out of the Marines and not deploying to Afghanistan hinged on a "medical discharge." Ever since basic training, the "70-pound" back packs he was expected to carry took their toll on his back and essentially ruined it, leaving him in chronic and occasionally excruciating pain. When I met Max, he had been documenting his doctor visits and making the case for the discharge. That said, Max appears constitutionally incapable of dwelling on the past. He begrudged no one for his decision to join the military. The military had served its purpose. He's seen the world, he has more focus in life, and it's given him the opportunity to

go to college for free. He fervently believes that he could not be the person he is today but not for *all* the experiences he has had to date. In point of fact (if in somewhat of a round about way) if not for the military, he would never have met his fiancée.

The first day I met Max he was giddy, skipping class to pick up an engagement ring for his fiancée[228]. His grandmother's diamond ring was ready and if he was to surprise his fiancee with it and, this was the only time he could pick it up. Max's fiancée already had a 4-year degree from the state's research-intensive university, but was returning to NECC to complete prerequisites needed for the state's nursing programs. With Max also completing courses at NECC before transferring to a 4-year university, the two lived together with Max's brother. She understood their financial situation. And she understood Max's. Though he worked 20- to 30 hours a week as a landscaper, it was just enough to pay bills. What she did not know however was that Max had leant his parents money for their own car, and as part of their repayment, they gave him his grandmother's diamond ring.

Max had attended a well-regarded middle, to upper middle class high school, one he had the utmost respect and admiration for. He remembered his guidance counselor fondly; how they agreed that had his grades been better in a few key classes, his post-secondary options might have been larger. He also remembered his *surprise* in math class when older athlete-friends who had been repeating the class suddenly graduated, how some friends were promoted to the next math class, while he and some of the others remained behind. Ultimately Max did not display very many, if any, signs of being *academically* integrated into his school. School was neither a series of learning moments, nor a pipeline to college, but a place for sports and for friends.

A two-sport athlete who played both baseball and basketball Max enjoyed high school. He just didn't care very much for the academic dimension of school. He never did. Even back in elementary school, he recalls, "trying to fib my way out of assignments half the time" 151 01. And though the only high school text he could recall ever reading from cover to cover was "All Quiet on the Western Front", fortunately for Max, reading and writing had always come naturally to him. To achieve even the "mediocre" grades he did receive he needed higher grades in English to balance the "terrible" grades he received in math.   Ultimately, he felt he did "ok"

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[228] I should say it was the first, and the last time he skipped one of Sander's classes.

in high school leaving with an "80%" average and this he did without "really trying or doing anything." However with "mediocre" grades and parents who had no money to send him to a college, he enrolled in NECC straight out of high school.

For Max, a basic reason for not trying any harder in high school was that he simply did not understand the "importance" of grades:

"… it was not putting the importance on, like, why do I have to get such good grades? I don`t care. Like ok, it feels good when I do [get good grades} but why do I care really? You know? We didn`t really talk about college and stuff. So its just like I kind of coasted through."

Also apparent was his belief that the absence of college college-talk at home, played an important role in his post-secondary decisions.

"I hit high school and they just never talked about college. I just didn't care. I just wanted to play basketball and baseball".

His parents are married, they have good relations with him and he has good relations with both of them; he "talks to them about everything. He remembers how they told him to get good grades and how upset they would get when he brought home bad "progress reports", but he also suggests that he now recognizes that their approach was nonehtlees insufficient.

"I wouldn't put fault on my parents, but that is kind of what it stems from.
The importance of schooling was never really there, even in high school not one time did they talk about college or anything"

Five years ago, when he first attended NECC, right away, classes seemed pointless and college onerous -- to pay for both his car and for college he had to stop playing baseball and concentrate on work. He recalled that,

"[e]veryone else is at college and I'm the only one commuting to school. I don't know what the hell I'm going to do. That's why I joined. I can't even afford another semester of NECC on my own so I might as well get it for free by doing this" 151 09

One day a few "buddies" who had not gone to college returned from boot camp and were pretty excited about their new experiences. Max had an uncle who was in the Army, who had thought it was kind of cool, and they told him that by serving he would ultimately get to go to college for free. He felt he needed direction, he certainly could use the money and he wanted to do something substantial, so he joined the Marines.

Max's fiancée, on the other hand, was a study in comparisons and contrasts. She came from the next town over, with parents of similar means and yet she had become much more academically accomplished. How this happened exactly, is still an open question for Max and one ponders upon occasion. He said,

"Katherine [his fiancée] and I talk about it a lot. I feel her parents and my parents were in the same boat" 151 15

In spite of occupying the same social position one factor above they feel her family is just how much "college was talked about in her house", compared to how it was categorically absent from his. In marked contrast to his fiancées world, no one person ever told him that learning or grades for that matter were all that important, or at least he didn't get this information from his parents in the persistent multilayered way that Katherine di

Currently Max is going to NECC on the post-911 GI Bill. He will finish his pre-requisites, then transfer to one of the regional state universities, possibly Eastern or Southern. He essentially admits that he is new to academics, but as for Sociology, he personally finds the "subject interesting", the professor likable, with an uncanny ability to "convey things well." 53 Max now takes his grades seriously. He was not only doing well in the Sociology course, but also in all of the others.

He knows he has a a ways to go still as he has found out that he can do a minimal amount of work and still get "good" grades. And while he follows along in the textbook as per the instructors orders and endeavors to make sense of what he is hearing, he does not read the textbook at home—an approach to studying he knew was limited. Somewhat cynically, referring to his previous approaches to studying he says, "the only thing I changed now is that I pay attention."   Yet he says this not to undermine the value of the textbook, but to underscore how much he his bad habits he has yet change and the significance of an active listener during lecture.

"I guess its just interesting to me mostly, just the subject itself you know. I could never really see myself getting into, you know, the field necessarily … Even just sitting, every day, I'll think of something from the class … it's just interesting seeing like, how different people have come up with like ways to basically, you know, all the sociologists that have … come-up with ways -- the Erickson thing for infancy, all that. Its just weird to put all that into play when you look at people's lives and your life. … I've seen different cultures and different soceities and things, then I can look at … what's written in these books and … kind of explain it … by looking at definitions and things and other examples of things. I guess its kind of cool to make some sort of connections.   Just besides thinking that I have this kind of abstract way of thinking of looking at things … I feel like some people just look over some things that I might look into a little more. But then it [sociology] gives you these guidelines, kind of to make something a little more of it, then just I've got to do this class for pre-requisites or whatever."

Max sees discipline as being able to provide a value added dimension to his comprehension of reality. He sees sociology as potentially explanatory. Something surprisingly more useful then he had expected from a pre-requiste class. And while he may not be able to display what it means to *comprehend* in the discipline, his focus on the lecture has allowed him to nonethless *apprehend* that there is a discipline their in the first place

Estelle's course taking experience

Estelle was a 30 year-old mother of a six-year old son. By the time I met her she was in her 3rd semester at NECC. In addition to Sociology, she was taking Psychology 201, Statistics, and College Algebra. She was getting an "A minus" in the course and her plan was to transfer to Central University's Math Education program the following semester; ultimately her goal was to teach high school math. Just over a year ago when she arrived at NECC she had been pursuing a 2-year degree in radiation technology; however, her she changed direction after an actual radiation technology class. On the one hand, one admittedly beneficial aspect of the course was that it provided her with an opportunity to "shadow" actual on-the- job technicians; however beyond that it was simply "stupidest class, it shouldn't even be taught". Nevertheless, compared to the Sociology course, it was only the "*second* worst class she had ever taken!"

Estelle first attended NECC 10 years ago, and between now and then she has had stints at Central University along with two other community college's within the state's system of higher education. Consequently, a negative impression of the sociology course was no small claim. In sum, she thought that Sociology itself was inherently interesting; her problem however was with Professor Sanders himself.

> "I think he is a very nice guy, who really enjoys the sound of his own voice. And I think that its uncomfortable. I don't always agree with my teachers but *he* says things that are just blatantly untrue. So I have a hard time trusting anything that he says". PD 143: 007

Beyond her reservations with much of what he says in class, his unwillingness to open up the class to discussion, she also finds particularly problematic.

> "He doesn't teach so that there is much class discussion. And I really think that that is probably one of the best ways to teach in my opinion, especially a subject like this." PD 143: 11

Moreover much of the lecture is often composed of anecdotes or stories that he offers as examples, ostensibly to illuminate the material, yet she finds them largely irrelevant:

"I don't mind hearing stories and anecdotes from a professor, if it ties into the material at all, but it should be short, I mean it shouldn't; he goes off on tangents that just go completely away from the subject that we're learning (she ends with an inquisitive tone as if to say, am I wrong)" PD 143: 28

In addition to paying scant attention to the experiences of students in the class, she expressed increasing contempt for the exclusive focus on his own:

"Some of his stories, they just seem really geared to like look what I've done. Look at the change I've made. I think it was me calling the security that made this kid get arrested and changed the fraternities across the, you know what I mean? [24]

That said, while Estelle had a checkered path through middle school, high school and post-secondary education, she loved elementary school. She recalled how in those days she won numerous academic "awards". She even continued to enjoy school through middle school and into high school; however, her enjoyment of school had increasingly less and less to do with academics, until the academic dimension was entirely consumed by the social. As things were falling apart in her parents marriage she enjoyed an expanded social scene, which in Estelle's case also had an unfortunate underside. She confessed, "the first time I was in rehab I was 15". Already by middle school, "I was a little bit of a party girl, shall we say, and it chased me. But I've been clean for like almost 10 years. So yeah, that's what happened". She dropped out of high school, and went on 'Phish' tour instead. Six months later; however, she returned to complete her high school degree at night.

According to Estelle her parents have apologized to her many times for those days. For her part, Estelle does not seem to blame them, but she does agree that they were unique and unfortunate times.

"You know things were so crazy between them, you know. My dad, he had his own pharmacy so he was working constantly, and my mom was always in bed. Or then she'd

take off and we'd have to go find her by making a police report, and then we'd find her, uchh (a combination of disgust and exasperation in her voice)."

Me: Was she on a park bench or something?

Estelle: Oh no! That was when the internet came out. Mommy had a lot of affairs, shall we put it that way. So she would disappear for … "84- 86

Both Estelle's parents graduated from college. Her father went to the flagship research university in the state and became a pharmacist, while her mother went to college to be a nurse. Estelle had mentioned a few times, " I love my daddy" and it became clear that it was Estelle's relationship with her mom and her mother's issues that was the context for her own "partying" and drug use in school. Her mother had a bit of a prescription drug problem herself, nothing so extreme, but it went, " from this to this to this to this".   Estelle also contextualizes her mothers behavior by mentioning that she had "an extremely awful childhood" and that "she's had numerous diagnoses". She described how her mother would often be in bed for "2 months straight"; and yet her mother was also the mayor of town mayor, and the President of the Board of Education!

"It made me angry because everyone was like 'oh you've got the best family and blah, blah, blah" 51

In point of fact, she recalled how the first time she ever got grounded was when she told her dad that she should divorce her.   Indeed when I first met Estelle her parents had finally now divorced and her father is "much better off" but in those much more difficult days, they were still together.

The rest of Estelle's siblings are all academically accomplished. Her oldest sister has a Master's in Library Science, and is working at a small prestigious private liberal arts college in the state; her other sister has a bachelor's degree in Sociology, a Master's degree in instruction and curriculum and teaches sixth grade while her little brother has Bachelor's degree in Political Science, also from the state's research university and has been in the Air Force now for the past

7 years. After she described her siblings and where they went to college, she added somewhat sarcastically, "so then there's me." Nonetheless, she has a "great" and supportive family.   They all love their dad, she talks to her sister every day and her brother is currently staying with her while he visits. Indeed this is a carry over from otherwise rosy childhood in which she her siblings, her some of her aunts and uncles and their kids all shared one very large house together.

Actually her father will occasionally ask her what she thinks her life would have been like if she had not done "this, that, or the other". She does not like to dwell on that too much.   In the end she has a son whom she loves dearly. She thinks much of what happened in high school was also simply rooted in her own personality. "I had that personality where I wanted to try things, and I did." She noted that not all of her friends went down the same hard road with drugs that she had, many had simply settled on "smoking pot."   Yet she recalled how when the DARE officer presented to the class in Middle School, with the officer showing the children "a big board of all the drugs they were not supposed to use" , she remembers that I she could think of was that "I want to try this one, that one and that one."

Moreover, Estelle was hooked on new experiences in general. "I wanted to go skydiving, and … I wanted to travel" All of which she did. In addition to travelling much of the US she's been to Mexico and Canada and in her early 20's she and a friend went to Europe with visits to Pompeii and the Oracle at Delphi standing out in particular.

As for the Sociology class, Estelle actually reads the textbook! She finds it interesting and on occasion will even share some of her more interesting discoveries with her sister. She reads it through once casually, then re-reads those sections Professor Sander's had alerted them would be on the test. However, that understanding that she has drawn from the text can be unsettled by his lectures.

"I actually have understood the material and then he tells a story and I leave there going, did I, do I understand the material? Maybe I don't because I don't think it makes sense from what he said in the story ... "

To illustrate her point she offered a story of her own:

I think he was talking about the first test and he was telling this story about how when he was a priest that there were these two men who committed suicide, and he was trying to compare it to, now I can't remember the term, but something that we were going to take our test on. And I remember asking my sister, going you know, 'I've read this in the book . This is the story, the examples that he gave us, *and I don't get it!'* And she was like, 'I have, I don't even know like how that relates'. And I think maybe it did, in a very like [indirect way]. … I'm confused on this.   And this is the topic or the story he gave to help us understand, and it made me even more confused.

I mean after that, that's when I was kind of like, 'maybe this guy really doesn't know what he is talking about or, cant explain it to us well, *maybe* is the better way to say it[229]"

Ultimately, Estelle was able to articulate succinctly what many in the classroom did more elaborately. Contrary to the sense that Sanders was likely a "very nice guy", as a teacher of sociology he had some deficiencies and that the class, in his hands, was minimized. In agreement with many of her peers, Estelle stipulated, "I don't think it's a hard class. But then I think a lot of this is, (pause) common sense". [30]

When you talk to Estelle, its hard not to get the impression that she would have no problem following in the footsteps of her siblings to attend more prestigious colleges. However, as a single mother at 30 who "wants a family", she feels that attending a prestigious college is missing the point. She wants to raise a family, and she knows she wants to be a math teacher. If she goes to a 4 year college close to her home, to "Central", it will qualify her for a teaching position just the same as attending any other place.

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[229] This is a distinction that she drew on in discussing her own field of math education where it is one thing to know the math, and quite another to be able to teach it. Although she has always loved math and does well in math classes, she does find it odd spends so much time learning math concepts you will never have to teach.

Logan's class

Alberta's course taking experiences

Alberta was an optimistic young African-American woman, about 24 years old, charming, quick to smile, who sat front and center for Professor Logan's class. When I met her she had a rather packed schedule. In addition to taking *Principles of Sociology,* she had a human services internship, an introductory mass communications course and an upper level psychology course. Alberta seemed incapable of criticizing anything or anyone, at least in front of strangers, but in a rare expression of dissatisfaction she conceded that the class was simply not as "engaging as it could be". Nonehtless, she 'liked' professor Logan, and from what she had gathered from the class so far, Sociology was "interesting" and relevant to her future career.

Alberta had always been studious. Indeed, whether it was at the Cafeteria or at the library, each time we met was in the process of studying. If Alberta does eventually obtain a college degree, she`ll be the first in her family to do so. Her mother is currently unemployed mother, but had attended some college at the state University; her mom even talks about returning some day, though Alberta knows she never will. Her stepfather on the other hand was a state trooper who went to the "academy", had some sort of "vocational" education, but had never been to college. Both were very proud of Alberta's academic accomplishments and "very supportive" of the educational decisions she makes. This is especially true in light of the fact that by Alberta`s own estimation, "half" of her friends never attended any college. Still, her parents, she said,

> "They really left it up to me. They thought that whatever I was doing was the right decision. They didn't force me to do anything. They said, 'Alberta, its up to you'."

However it is her grandmother and her mother who are her biggest "cheerleaders". While Alberta, for her part, is cheerleader and self-conscious a role model to her two younger siblings. Beaming and smiling when she discusses them, she is especially delighted about her

younger sister's accomplishments. She told me unequivocally, "My sister is in college. I'm so proud of her; she's at Archway". *Archway,* at 20 years old, is one of the state's newest community colleges.

That said, Alberta's own path through higher education hasn't been without its share of detours. Straight from her large, 2, 000 student, public high school, she left for *Regional State University.* Choosing RSU was the clear-cut choice and easy decision. Indeed, since at least her freshman year, she had always just assumed she would enroll at RSU once she finished high school. The campus was only a 7- minute commute from home. Going to RSU meant not having to spend money on room and board, and not having to leave her family.

Back in those days Alberta was going to be a nurse; however things did not quite go as planned. When discussing her experience at *Regional State University*, she is appears comfortable bringing up her departure from RSU but curiously un willing to go into any details. She was very general and impressionistic about her time there, except to say that it was *categorically* not for her. What she does say is that the "pressure" of it all, back then, was too much: the classes were too large, she was not getting the support from of her academic advisor that she wanted and the nursing field turned out to be much more academically competitive than she had ever imagined. Nonetheless, she focuses on how she simply did not have the resources she needed to attend.

> "I`m the type of person where I have to have certain things before I enter college, so that I am better prepared. Like for example, I did not have a car at the time, and I didn't have like a steady job; so it was very overwhelming"

Most of the time Alberta took the public bus to get to the university, but one day after walking some all too-familiar-path (either to or from the bus) she recalled

> "…I remember walking down a long hill, just to get to school, by the time I got to school, I was dripping, just hot and just aggravated, and after a while it just got to me. And I was like, I can`t do this no more."

She took a semester off to "reboot" and gave the nearby, public 4-year university another try; she lasted only one more semester before leaving. Not long afterwards and still pursuing her dream of being a nurse, she enrolled in a 14 month LPN (practical nursing) program at a local *for-profit* technical institute (one with over 60 campuses nation-wide). And while the total cost was just under 33,000 dollars (and likely met through a substantial amount of federal financial aid) it was the volume of work and the sheer impossibility of balancing it with any non-student commitments that changed her mind about nursing for good.

When I questioned her about the workload at the institute, the mere recollection of it still had the capacity to overwhelm.

> "Oh- My-God! That course work was very intensive! I mean, you can't really have a life, when it's a 15-month program. So you got to imagine that all the work is put into 15 months"

Alberta has been a student at NECC now for the last 4 semesters and things she admits are going well. She is no longer pursuing nursing, but her career interests are now better defined. She feels now as if she can give of herself, while also doing for herself. Unequivocally she proclaims, "I want to be a helper", and this time, she says "its for me".

Currently she is a Human Services major and is fortunate to be working in her field as a residence counselor. At the moment she sees herself working with battered women in the future and is excited by the "challenge" of working with such a client population. Moreover, coupled with this powerful re-emerging sense of career, so too has her desire to obtain bachelors degree remerged. Her plan is to leave NECC with her associates and eventually to pursue a BSW (Bachelor's in Social Work). Much of this plan still remains nebulous, yet to the degree she has explored more concretely where she might obtain her bachelors, she has focused thus far on *Spiritus Magnus* -- A private 4-year university, also local, and also considerably more expensive than any public option. However one thing is for certain. She will not be returning to Regional State University. Not only is that door closed but also if she had to do it all over again, she thinks she would still find her way to New England Community College.

According to her schedule, Alberta is supposed to be working 25.5 hours a week. However over the last 3 weeks has worked a full time. Last time I spoke to her she expected she might be working yet another 40-hour week. As she told me this she giggled, recognizing she was supposed to be full time student and a part time worker, not the other way round.   However, so far things have remained manageable and the additional income is welcome. While the presence of the TV in her is too much for any effective studying, the library with its extended hours has since become her "best friend". Finally, she admits to being fortunate so as to have the hours between 9 and 11PM, after her clients go to sleep, which she uses to do her schoolwork.

Appendix 2: Dissertation Case Record

Appendix E: "Principles of Scoiolgy": Three cases of course-taking at New England Community College

Principles of Sociology--Instructor/Achebe	Principles of Sociology--Instructor/Sanders	Principles of Sociology--Instructor/Logan
INTERVIEWS	**INTERVIEWS**	**INTERVIEWS**
Instructor Interviews (N = 2)	Instructor Interviews (N =3)	Instructor Interviews (N =2)
Student Interviews (N =11)	Student Interviews (N =20)	Student Interviews (N =10)
OBSERVATIONS	**OBSERVATIONS**	**OBSERVATIONS**
Classroom Observations (field notes)	Classroom Observations (field notes)	Classroom Observations (field notes)
Audio Recorded lessons for revisiting (N =16)*	Audio Recorded Lessons for revising (N =13)*	Audio Recorded Lessons for revisitng (N =12)*
DOCUMENTS	**DOCUMENTS**	**DOCUMENTS**
Transcribed Instructors (N =1)	Transcribed Instructors (N =1)	Transcribed Instructors (N =1)
Transcribed Lessons (N = 4)	Transcribed Lessons (N =4)	Transcribed Lessons (N = 4)
Students Transcribed from (N = 8)	Students Transcribed from (N = 6)	Students Transcribed from (N = 5)
Syllabus	Syllabus	Syllabus
Final Grades	Final Grades	Final Grades
Student note book	Final Exam	Midterm Study Guide
Set of PowerPoint Outlines	Term Paper Assignement	Midterm Exam
Blackboard manged test (N =1)	Quizzes (N =5)	Research Paper Assignments (N =2)
	Newspaper handout (N =2)	Final Exam Study Guide
		Film Commentary Assignments (N =2)
		In-class reading (N =1)
		In class group assignments (N =2)
		Student Papers (N =2)

Case Context Data
Documents/Interviews/Observations

Campus Flyers from Dean of Students (N =3)	Interview with Dean of Academic and Student Affairs
Metropolitan Newspaper Articles (N =6)	Excerpts from rival textbook
College Publicaitons/brochures (N =12)	Phone interview with textbook author
School Newspaper Articles (N =6)	Hanging out at table soccer etc.
New England Community College Catalog	
New England Community College Website	

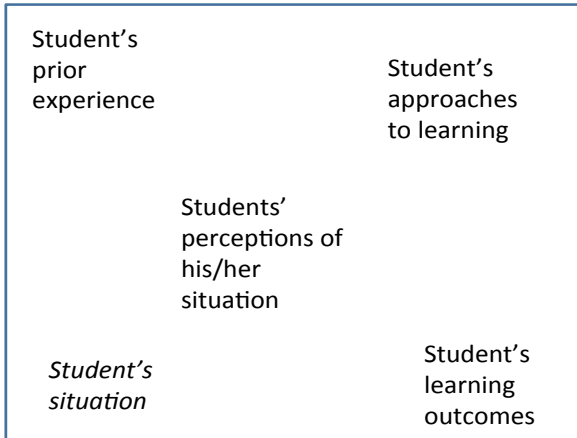# Appendix 3: Tinto's Original Model of College Persistence
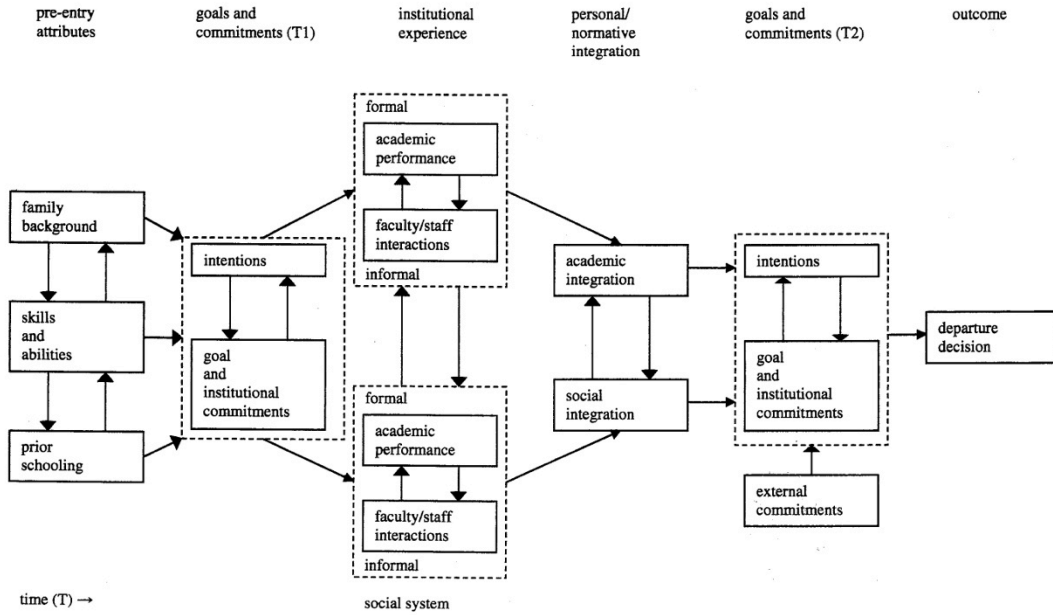
Figuur 1: het studiestakingsmodel van Tinto (1987:114)

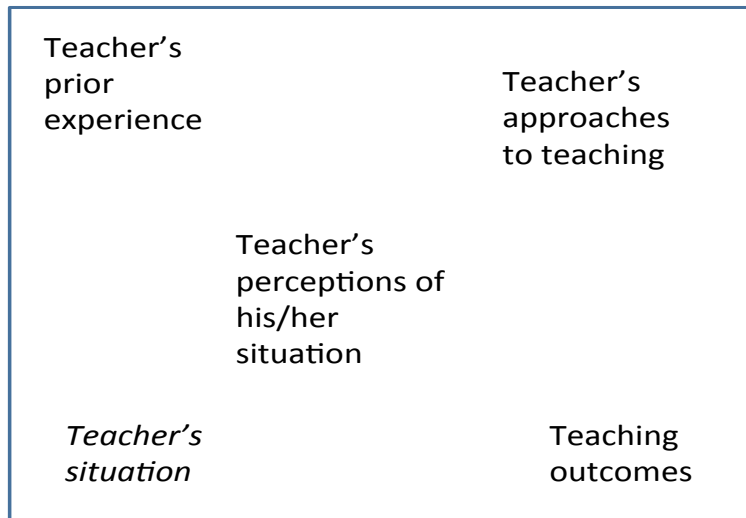**Appendix 4 : Tinto's Modified Model of College Persistence**
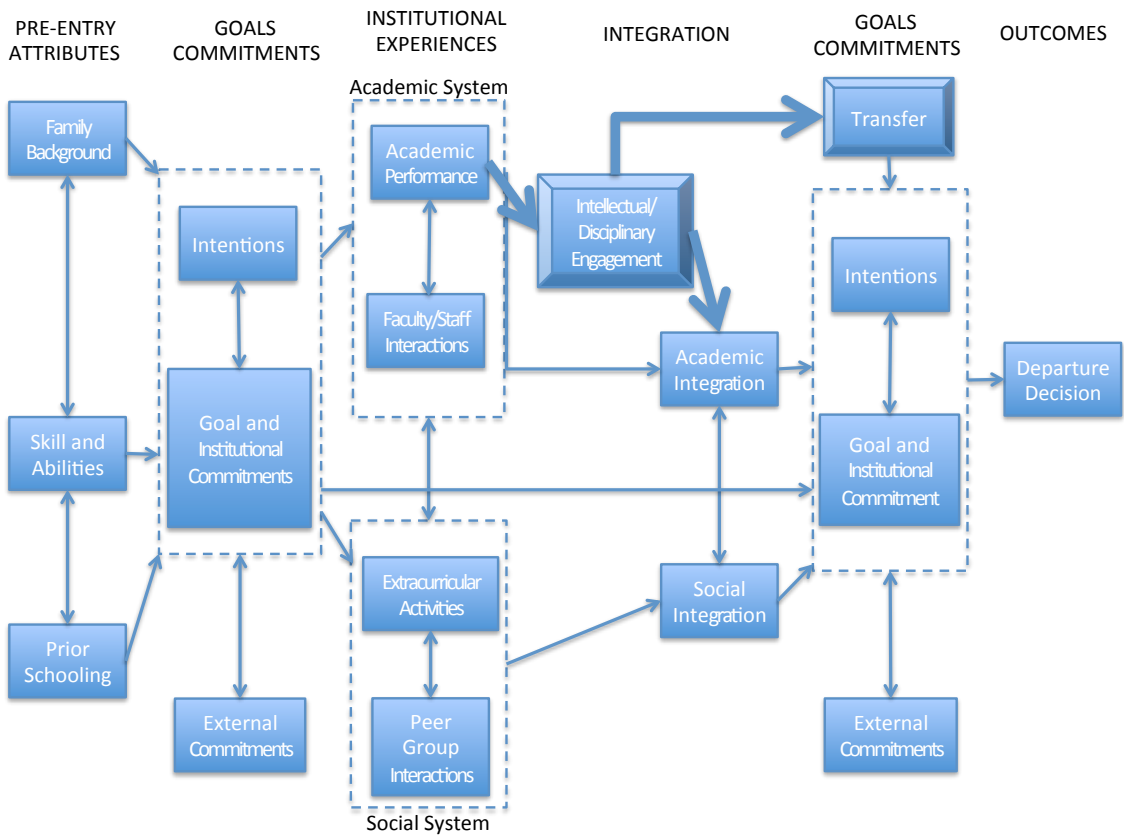
Appendix 5: Experience of Learning. Source: Prosser and Trigwell, 2002 p. 17.

Learning and Teaching Context

Student's
prior
experience

Student's
approaches
to learning

Students'
perceptions of
his/her
situation

*Student's
situation*

Student's
learning
outcomes

Appendix 6: Experience of Teaching Source: Prosser and Trigwell, 2002 p. 137

Learning and Teaching Context

Teacher's
prior
experience

Teacher's
approaches
to teaching

Teacher's
perceptions of
his/her
situation

*Teacher's
situation*

Teaching
outcomes

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