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David D. Blouin and Evelyn M. Perry

Beyond the Field Trip: Teaching Tourism through Tours
Shaul Kelner and George Sanders

Responding to the Quantitative Literacy Gap among Students in Sociology Courses
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Notes

“I’ll Take Ideology for $200, Alex”: Using the Game Show Jeopardy! to Facilitate Sociological and Critical Thinking
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Roxanna Harlow

Shaped Goals: Teaching Undergraduates the Effects of Social Stratification on the Formulation of Goals
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Book Reviews

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GUIDELINES FOR PAPERS SUBMITTED TO TEACHING SOCIOLOGY

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NOTICE TO CONTRIBUTORS
Teaching Sociology publishes several types of papers. The basic distinction is between articles and notes. Generally, articles are longer than notes, more analytical, contain an extensive literature review and data analysis. Notes are shorter (usually 15 pages or less), contain a shorter literature review, and present and assess a teaching technique. The distinction reflects the dual purposes of the journal: 1) to provide a forum for analyzing the teaching of sociology, and 2) as a forum for the exchange of specific teaching ideas.

Articles are evaluated using some combination of the following criteria:
1. How useful and original are the ideas presented?
2. How thoroughly does the author consider implications for the teaching of sociology?
3. How well developed is the basic analytical point?
4. Is there sociological theory and/or analysis?
5. How thoroughly and accurately does the author ground the paper in the literature?
   • Are there articles in Teaching Sociology that the author should cite?
   • Does the paper tie into the larger literature on pedagogy?
6. How extensively does the author extend previous ideas and bring some intellectual closure to the topic?
7. In an empirical study, how sound is the methodology and how accurately do the presented results reflect the data? If applicable, how is student success measured and is there evidence that demonstrates that learning outcomes were achieved?
8. How well written is the paper?
   • How well integrated is the paper?
   • How well organized is the paper?

Notes are evaluated using some combination of the following criteria:
1. How useful, original, and transferable is the technique, strategy, or idea?
   • Does the paper discuss the types of classes and institutions where the technique can be used?
2. How cogently are the ideas and implications presented?
3. Is the description sufficiently detailed so a reader could easily employ it?
4. Does the paper say more than “I tried this and I liked it?”
5. Is there a brief literature review?
6. Does the author address potential difficulties with the technique and suggest possible solutions?
7. Is qualitative or quantitative outcome data reported?
8. How well written is the paper?
   • How well integrated is the paper?
   • How well organized is the paper?

GUIDELINES FOR PAPERS SUBMITTED TO TEACHING SOCIOLOGY
FOR THE CONVERSATION SECTION

Teaching Sociology publishes brief comments, arguments, conversations, interviews, and responses related to a wide variety of issues in teaching sociology. The purpose of the Conversation section is to stimulate lively, thoughtful, topical, and controversial discussion. The Conversation section serves as a forum for an on-going exchange of ideas, arguments, responses, and commentary on issues that present the teacher of sociology with formidable challenges, dilemmas, and problems. Submissions to the Conversation section are refereed.

Conversations are evaluated using some combination of the following criteria:
1. How useful and original are the author’s ideas, arguments, and/or commentary?
2. How relevant are the author’s ideas, arguments, and/or commentary to issues in teaching sociology?
3. How well do the author’s ideas and arguments contribute to an on-going dialogue on issues and dilemmas related to teaching sociology?
4. How thoroughly does the author consider implications for the teaching of sociology?
5. How cogently are the ideas and implications presented?
6. How well developed is the author’s basic point/argument?
7. How well written is the paper?
   • How well integrated is the paper?
   • How well organized is the paper?

APPLICATION PAPERS IN TEACHING SOCIOLOGY

Teaching Sociology occasionally publishes applications of current research. The purpose of application papers is to make sociological research more accessible to undergraduate students by providing instructors with pedagogical tools for incorporating current research in their undergraduate courses. Application papers present learning activities, discussion questions, and other student-centered learning techniques that can be used in a variety of undergraduate courses. Applications are solicited by the editor.

Revised: August 22, 2007
I am happy to report that the next editor of *Teaching Sociology* has been formally announced by the American Sociological Association. Kathleen Lowney, Professor of Sociology at Valdosta State University, will be taking over the reins at the end of this year. Starting July 1, 2009, all manuscripts should be sent to:

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Liz Grauerholz  
Editor
"I’LL TAKE IDEOLOGY FOR $200, ALEX": USING THE GAME SHOW JEOPARDY TO FACILITATE SOCIOLOGICAL AND CRITICAL THINKING*

DAN PENCE
California State University-Chico

ONE OF THE UNIQUE PROMISES of sociology is to illuminate the intersection of the personal and public by encouraging largely individually-oriented students to examine interrelationships between themselves and the social world (Mills 1959). This can be an especially challenging task when teaching introductory sociology courses that are populated largely by first-year students who enrolled to satisfy a general education requirement and are probably getting their first and last taste of sociology. The assignment described here (see Attachment A) asks these students to find, describe, and explain underlying themes common to American education and the television game show, Jeopardy! I have found that relying on students' enormous store of concrete experiences related to school and television watching helps this assignment fulfill sociology’s distinctive promise in a lively, engaging, and empowering way.

The task facing instructors teaching introductory courses is made more difficult when they help beginning college students wrestle with abstract concepts that, for the most part, are new and sometimes intimidating to them. Thus this assignment is designed to introduce two abstract concepts considered by many to be central to a sociological perspective—the sociological imagination and critical thinking—in ways that reduce students' unfamiliarity with or even resistance to addressing abstract material by framing these concepts in their personal experiences.

There is a broad range of examples of how to promote the sociological imagination in introduction courses, from dramatic class presentations (Brouillette and Turner 1992) to more subtle technological approaches (Youtube 2007). One factor that helps make this assignment especially effective is the use of two social institutions which are intimately and vividly familiar to virtually all introductory students: school and Jeopardy! Using two widely shared frames of reference helps students not only to see abstract connections between the structures of school and Jeopardy!, but also to recognize how their personal experiences have been influenced by, and in turn influence, themes common to those broad, society-wide institutions.

Having students uncover taken-for-granted themes and structures that are common both to their school experiences and their knowledge of Jeopardy! also seems to help ease their fears about the “overused and imprecisely defined" concept of critical thinking (Grauerholz and Bouma-Holtrop 2003:485). Among the many critical thinking models, I use a rubric adapted from Brookfield (1987) and Ore (2006) partly because its framework strongly reinforces the sociological imagination. The main elements used in this assignment are 1) identifying taken-for-granted assumptions that underpin abstract values and concepts deemed important to society; and 2) developing an awareness of one’s place and time in our culture—one’s standpoint—which is a clear reinforcement of Mills’s emphasis on the intersection of self, society, and history.

Research indicates that students are aided in understanding abstract concepts like the sociological imagination and thinking criti-

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Editor’s note: The reviewers were, in alphabetical order, Rebecca Bach, Kathleen Lowney, and Stephen Scanlan.
cally through active learning, often described as collaborative exercises and engagement among students, instructors, and course content (Kaufman 1997; Steele 2003). There is also evidence that students are more likely to become active learners when course content directly connects to their lived experiences (Davis 1993; Misra 2000). Thus this assignment requires students to actively and consciously rely upon their own experiences to complete the work.

More to the point of this assignment, research indicates that using popular culture can be effective in fostering students’ awareness of a sociological imagination (Albers and Bach 2003; Tipton and Tiemann 1993) and improving their critical thinking skills (Remender 1992; Valdez and Halley 1999). Forms of popular culture are varied and rapidly changing (see Misra 2000 for an extensive list of references), but television remains one of the most widespread. The average student has watched nearly five hours of television every day of her or his life (Sourcebook for Teaching 2007), and Jeopardy!, first aired in 1964, is the longest running game show in television history and one of the most watched shows of all time.

Because most major social institutions are animated by core American values, such as competition, individualism, and success, other institutions, including fast food, health care delivery, or the legal system, could be paired with education to uncover common, taken-for-granted themes. But Jeopardy! also embodies essential meanings which lie at the heart of education, such as intelligence and knowledge. It is powerful for students to use personal, often intimate, and sometimes painful experiences to critique their own values and experiences about education while they are engaged in some of those very behaviors.

**THE ASSIGNMENT**

**The Class**
The student comments in this teaching note are from work submitted in a single class and are representative of comments over the years. The demographics of this particular class of 42 reflected the university as a whole. In addition, 38 of the 42 were first-year students, and only one had previous exposure to sociology.

Jeopardy! was also a common reference point for students in this class. All 42 had seen the show, and 12 still watched it at least once a month. In five years of using this assignment, fewer than 20 out of nearly 400 students felt they did not have an understanding of it. On those rare occasions (almost always an international student), several students would immediately recite the days, times, and channels to watch the show locally that week.

Schooling was also a near-universal experience, as all students had attended private or public schools prior to college. The merging of education and the game show are also reflected in the experiences of my students. One quarter of the class had used the Jeopardy! format in at least one of their school classes for quizzes, class or school competitions, or student presentations, attesting to Jeopardy! as a still-contemporary example of popular culture.

**Preparation for the Assignment**
This assignment introduces two abstract concepts, critical thinking and ideology, and I try to use one or two classes to introduce and develop each concept.

By the semester’s second week, students read in class a one-page handout on critical thinking (see Attachment B), then break into small groups to discuss and apply the hand-out to concrete examples. To get students started, I usually offer one or two statements for them to think about critically, something like, “bathrooms need to be sex-segregated,” “humans are naturally competitive,” or “the best students go to the best colleges.” Each small group is to come up with several underlying assumptions about the statement, such as what is it about females and males the might lead to sex-segregated bathrooms.

For the next class session students bring one question they have about the handout
and critical thinking in general, and a one-page example of their own application of critical thinking, using the points discussed in class and on the handout. Students break into small groups to try to answer their questions and discuss their examples, then we move back to the class as a whole for more discussion.

Many first-year students have difficulty analyzing issues, and so I do not want to overwhelm them at the start of the semester. Thus I concentrate on those elements of critical thinking that provide a strong descriptive framework, such as seeing this specific classroom experience through the social location of student, instructor, and parent.

The Assignment
In the next class students are given the assignment to “Connect underlying themes or assumptions of American education and the television game show Jeopardy! That is, find underlying themes and assumptions that appear in both American education and the show.” The written instructions include an example of a common underlying assumption: quick recall of facts is a sign of intelligence. Students are not given a page length, though I tell them that, short of being a poet, they cannot possibly address what is asked in less than two pages. They are encouraged to do more.

Students’ initial reaction is often bewilderment. One student reflected many of her peers’ confusion when she wrote, “When we were talking, it seemed a little bit strange to compare a game show to our educational system. On the surface they are unrelated.” Their early bewilderment dissipates as we discuss examples. For instance, one semester my example of “quick recall is a sign of intelligence” quickly brought out that the quick recall was of “unconnected” facts. Other potential themes quickly emerged—the physical setting, Trebek as the teacher/expert—at which time I usually end the discussion; I want enough time to generate several examples but not enough time to hamper their independent thinking.

OUTCOMES

Sociological Imagination
Once students found themes common to both education and the game show, they began to see these themes emerging in their past and current experiences. One wrote, “Once ideas about my education and the show started to come to me, then I kind of got on a roll. Even my roommates got sick of me telling them about what they were really watching. ‘Look!’ I yelled, ‘the contestants are forced to stare at Alex. They never talk to each other. Sound familiar?’” He went on to analyze the seating in our classroom (50 seats bolted to the floor in a tiered, theater-style arrangement) as not only reproducing the instructor as the expert but also reproducing everyone else as “less than.”

Using experiences related to education and Jeopardy! allows students to not only see connections between their school experiences and their watching of a television show, but also provides a common frame from which they can see connections between their experiences and those of other students. This multi-layered intersection encourages students to see their personal connections as related social experiences which can help them extend these connections into arenas apart from education and popular culture.

One first-year student used the interaction between the personal and public as a jumping-off place to explore herself. She noted, “I am a model of our educational system... that teaches us how to be successful. I recognize this now, and am in the process of determining for myself how the person I was molded into might be successful outside the educational system that largely produced me. Then, to relax from all this worrying and thinking, I sit down to watch a little TV. Hmm, how about a game of Jeopardy! . . . Pretty ironic.” She had become acutely aware of the impact of society on her self-identity as well as some of the subtle interactions between her identity, education, and popular culture.
Critical Thinking
Finding taken-for-granted ideological assumptions is the first step in this critical thinking framework, and every student identified at least three abstract themes common to education and Jeopardy! Once students began to uncover ideological connections, many reported an often dramatic “aha” reaction. As one student wrote, “I honestly couldn’t believe what I was finding. I was shocked. No, no, I was disturbed. And I couldn’t stop looking for more [his emphasis].”

The other element of the critical thinking rubric is that students become sensitive to their, or any individual’s, standpoint in relation to broader society. Looking at social class, one student asked about the Jeopardy! contestants, “Why are they all professionals? Where are all the bus drivers?” Another connected her high school cliques’ emphasis on clothes to a broader analysis of class and appearance: “American culture is focused on image—we are absolutely dominated by the idea that a person is defined by how they look. In my high school the preppy-looking rich kids were the cool group. Now [as an adult] it’s professional attire [that] equals intelligence and authority—in a classroom or on a game show—and this is only a single example of how America reproduces the ideology of image.”

Others used standpoint to connect their experiences as students to gender. One wrote, “Women in my classes do not display much confidence in answering a question, even when they are certain their answer is correct. This could be an example of deeper gender ideologies of women’s role as submissive and unqualified.” Another investigated the game show (of course, via the Internet) and found that three of the four young researchers who designed all the questions were females. She wondered why female researchers consistently wrote questions that seemed aimed toward males.

SUMMARY
I originally envisioned this assignment as being potentially interesting and perhaps a bit of fun, but it has evolved into a productive and powerful teaching and learning tool. There are several strengths to this assignment. First, it addresses two central goals of the class: 1) it pushes students to think critically quickly at the start of both the assignment and the semester; and 2) it is a comfortable transition for individually-oriented students to locate tangible personal experiences in a more abstract social context. It can move students toward what has been described as “critical sociological thinking—critical thinking with a sensitivity to and awareness of social and cultural contexts” (Grauerholz and Bouma-Hiltrop 2003:485).

Second, it provides a variety of levels for students to engage with the material, from descriptive to analytical. At best, this assignment helps students to actively engage in critical thinking and adopt the sociological imagination. At the least, most students are able to begin thinking critically and to begin applying the sociological imagination.

Third, this is a very flexible assignment. Though I suggest several days of groundwork, I have used other formats: one day for each concept, both concepts in a single class, or without any presentation on critical thinking; and I have completed the entire assignment as an oral, in-class exercise. Each variation produces quality results, but not with the depth of the more extensive model. This model can also be revised for upper division courses. For example, in gender studies, students find common themes in education, Jeopardy!, and patriarchy.

Fourth, students often gain quick confidence because, at the start of a semester, they realize they can and are thinking critically. Their confidence is also enhanced by relying on personal experiences that can be alive and lively; alive because they are often
raw or current (many consider junior high as a long degradation ceremony), and lively because they can be so emotional, from laugh-out-loud funny to painfully humiliating.

Finally, this assignment provides a structure and insights that get referred to many times throughout the semester, deepening many subsequent discussions about issues and topics that one would not necessarily see as connected.

Thinking sociologically and critically are difficult concepts to measure. I have taught courses without using this assignment and hesitate to make comparative claims about the results this assignment produces, but it does seem to resonate with students. On the open ended question, “What did you like most about this course?” five of the 34 students who evaluated this course mentioned this specific assignment. In courses without this assignment, no specific piece of work or assignment was mentioned.

Yet, as elusive as sociological and critical thinking are to measure, this assignment consistently brings results that are thoughtful and creative. For example, this is the introduction of a first-year student’s essay:

(Raquel asks): “I’ll take ‘Travesties’ for $500, Dan.”
(Dan responds): “The answer is, ‘Success comes from memorizing facts, thinking within the box, quick recall, and not questioning authority.’”
(Raquel rings in): “What are the four pillars supporting the travesty of American education?”
(Dan responds): “That is correct, Raquel.”

ATTACHMENT A

Assignment 1: Education and Jeopardy!
1. Read online handout, “Critical Thinking.”
2. In a typed, double-spaced assignment:
   a. **Describe** similarities between American education and the game show, Jeopardy!
      i. Make these as concrete as you can make them. Rely on your own school experiences. Refer to your standpoint as well as the standpoint of others in both education and television-watching.
   b. **Connect** underlying themes or assumptions of American education and Jeopardy!
      i. That is, find underlying themes and assumptions that appear in both American education and Jeopardy! (see elements of critical thinking).
      a. For example, both American education and Jeopardy! tend to reward quick recall of facts.
   c. **Describe** how these assumptions and themes appear in other social arenas and institutions.
      i. Use examples to illustrate your discussion.
   d. **Describe** some personal implications or consequences of these connections.
      i. That is, describe some impacts these common themes have had on you.
   e. **Describe** some society-wide implications of these connections.
3. This assignment is the essence of a sociological imagination and critical thinking.
   a. Look beneath common-sense beliefs; find connections between apparently unconnected social phenomena; pay attention to the intersection of self, society, and history (“standpoint”); and seek alternative ways of thinking.
4. Take intellectual risks. Do not be afraid of making mistakes or of not quite “getting it.” The best work is that which moves beyond the obvious, so please stretch yourself.
5. Be creative. Explore ideas with no litmus test for being “right.” Relax and enjoy!!!

ATTACHMENT B

**Critical Thinking:**
To think critically is to ask questions about what is assumed to be real, valued, and significant in our culture.

1. **Identify and challenge assumptions.**
   a. Try to identify the assumptions that are the foundation of the concepts, values, beliefs, and behaviors that we deem important in our society.
      i. Only once we identify underlying assumptions can we explore these assumptions’ accuracy and legitimacy.
   b. We need to consider whether or not what we take for granted does reflect the realities we and others experience.
      i. That is, ask: “do these assumptions reflect reality?” or “do these assumptions shape what we observe?”
2. We need to be aware of our and others' place and time in our culture.
   a. We need to be aware of our standpoint—the position from which we are asking these questions.
   b. See our individual location at a particular intersection of our individual experiences, where we stand historically, and the influences of culture
      i. Always ask: how is the intersection of history and culture influenced by our race or ethnicity, sex, age, sexuality, social class, etc.
   c. See others' location as an intersection of their experiences, history, and culture.
      i. Always ask: how is the intersection of history and culture influenced by others' race or ethnicity, sex, age, sexuality, social class, etc.
   a. For example, all written and visual artifacts are produced from a particular standpoint. None of these artifacts is neutral; it is not possible. That goes for the evening news as well as any textbook you are using.

3. Search for alternative ways of seeing, thinking, and making sense of the world.
   a. Considering alternatives to current ways of thinking can provide us with new insights about widely accepted ideas, beliefs, and meanings.
   b. This is a key element to resisting the influence and impact of any dominant reading* on us as individuals, members of various groups, and on our culture as a whole.

REFERENCES


Dan Pence is an assistant professor in the sociology department at California State University-Chico. He teaches courses in popular culture, gender, and social inequality. His current research on masculinity examines some of the impacts of popular culture on boys and young men and the influence of masculinity on college male’s eating behaviors.