

# TEACHING NOTES

Brief articles on teaching interventions are found in this section. Here clinical sociologists who teach - in classrooms, field offices and/or training workshops - discuss their techniques. The two pieces included in this issue are by Brian Sherman of Oglethorpe University in Atlanta and Thomas Rice from Denison University.

Brian Sherman came to Oglethorpe five years ago from Richmond College, which was part of the City University of New York. His interests are culture, networks, social change, art and community. He is a percussionist in a jazz band and also an active member of the Voting Rights Act Study Group of the Southern Regional Council. As a member of the Study Group, he has been collecting information indicating that Blacks are discriminated against at every level of the political process in Georgia. He recently presented this information to a U.S. House Judiciary subcommittee.

Thomas Rice has been at Denison since 1973 except for the year he spent at the University of Ireland doing research on returning Irish immigration. He is interested in economic democracy, the process of stratification and third world relations. Recently he has been writing about what he considers to be British atrocities in Northern Ireland. As part of the ASA Teaching Resources group, Rice has been a consultant to sociology departments on matters of curriculum and faculty development.

Sherman and Rice challenge passivity in the college classroom in different ways. Sherman describes his use of "scores" or "happenings" and Rice outlines his guidelines for students who have been asked to formulate "core questions." Both authors are interested in hearing your reactions to their pieces and would like to hear from those who have used these techniques - or some variation - in their own teaching.

## **SCORES: UNCONVENTIONAL HAPPENINGS FOR TEACHING SOCIOLOGY<sup>1</sup>**

Brian Sherman  
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I have tried a number of different unconventional methods of teaching sociological analysis to undergraduates. One involves creating a series of events which are outside the realm of what students generally anticipate will

take place in a classroom. My students have come to call these events "happenings."<sup>2</sup> In this paper I will describe "scores," one of the types of happenings I have used in my classes.<sup>3</sup> A score may be defined as a set of instructions for carrying out activities. Each carrying out of a score is called a "realization" of the score.

To illustrate scoring, I will describe in detail a typical score I present on the first day of class. I tell the class that we will begin the course by doing a score. I hand out a set of instructions such as the following:<sup>4</sup>

**\*\*At three different times during the score, read aloud the *same paragraph* from a place or position in the room in which you usually do not find yourself. Direct your reading to another point in the room at least some distance away from you. The paragraph may be selected from a book or paper you have with you, or from any other source.**

**\*\*Take a bottle or a jar and go to a water source. Fill the bottle less than half way with liquid. Upon returning, pour the water as carefully as possible into another jar or bottle.**

**\*\*Select a quiet percussive sound. At two different points during the score, make your sound eleven times.**

**\*\*Write one word on the front blackboard. You may write any word of your choice.**

**\*\*Go some place in the room or in the nearby vicinity and measure a geographical dimension with some unit of your body other than the length of your foot. Make a record of your measurement and write it on the rear blackboard.**

**\*\*Listen quietly with your eyes closed for one minute while standing someplace in the room.**

**\*\*Locomote backwards very slowly some time during the score.**

**\*\*Go off the classroom floor. Continue until you come to an appropriate place. Stop. Make some sort of gesture to indicate "This is the appropriate place." Return to the classroom.**

I ask the students to carry out each instruction to the letter. I ask them to be serious in their demeanor and to realize each instruction in a task-like fashion without adding any drama, characterization, embellishment, interpretation, or distancing reaction such as giggling. I tell them there are to be no sights, sounds, or movements except those which are necessary for the realization of the score. I explain that they can do the instructions in any sequence. I ask them to indicate by a certain sign such as "attach something, pink, yellow, or white to your person" when they have finished and to remain at rest in their seats until everyone has completed the score.

I do not explain the purpose of the score. I do say that I hope it will be an esthetically rewarding experience for them, and if not, at least pleasant and/or

interesting, and that we will discuss it afterwards. I assure them that the instructions contain only tasks which anyone can carry out and that no judgment will be rendered on any individual.

Some are puzzled about why they are being asked to do this on the first day of class. Others indicate in one way or another that I am violating the norms of classroom behavior by asking them to do more than sit and take notes or participate in discussions. Others, because they have heard about me or because they like any exception to routine classroom activity, look forward to carrying out the score. I usually rely on creating enough feelings of trust and community among ourselves in order to get 100% participation. There is also the implicit authority in my role of teacher.

Before we begin, I ask the students to take a few seconds to experiment with their sounds. I have each one present his/her sound so that I can ascertain that it is in fact percussive. This serves as an ice-breaking opportunity for students to be active in the classroom.

The first score usually takes about 20 or 25 minutes. There is a gradual decrease in the quantity of activity towards the end as one student and then another completes the score. The students are usually very good about carrying out the instructions in a sequence of their choice. What results during the realization is that at any given moment there is a different set of simultaneous activities occurring. At one moment for example the room might be relatively quiet so that the sound of pouring water is prominent. A few moments later two or three students may be in the midst of declaiming their paragraphs while someone else is making percussive sounds and someone else's backwards locomotion has produced some unanticipated noise. During the course of the happening the diminutions and swellings of activity, sights, and sounds become episodic and take on a regularity that seems patterned.

One of my original motivations for doing these kinds of classroom happenings was that I wanted some examples of social behavior to analyze which I knew everyone in the class had experienced. I learned early during my first semester as a teacher that there was no set of concrete social experiences in the world beyond the classroom that all the students shared. I wanted the examples to have some of the complexity of the real social world in which one's own personal experience is an insufficient sampling of the whole. This is one of the reasons I have a task in the first score which requires each student to leave the room and miss some of the activity while at the same time performing some action which only he or she and perhaps one or two others is aware of.

After the score, we take a few minutes to verbalize feelings about the score and to collect any observations that students may have made. Next we attempt a systematic description of what happened during the score. This is particularly challenging to the students because scores follow neither the conventional logic of reason with means and ends, nor dramatic logic with beginnings, sequencings and endings. I ask the students to describe what they did,

saw, and heard without reference to the rules' which initially set up the score. For example, they are asked not to say they saw someone locomoting backwards, but to describe the movement they saw and when they saw it, and to limit their description to their observations. They are also asked to note in their description actions which deviated from or were unanticipated by the original instructions of the score. Sometimes the best students try to arrive at a complete historical reconstruction of the events of the score. I have to tell them that this is not the task of sociological analysis. Rather I lead them into describing the score in terms of analytical parameters. These include categories of behavior, frequencies of behavior, and the environmental context of time and space. The categories of behavior are not simply one each for each of the instructions in the score, but include a number of different types of behavior not necessarily mentioned in the instructions. I try to make these parameters as concrete as possible.

We complete the description by summarizing the realization in terms of a few of its basic characteristics. Then I ask each student to consider it as a single esthetic event and to devise a name for it. Names are dropped into a hat. One student draws a name at random and that becomes the name of the score. After we have described the score, we start to analyze it. We begin the analysis using the students' language and concepts. These include cause and effect, purpose, judgmental terms such as good, bad, beautiful, and boring, and choosing most and least favorite instructions.

I then suggest that we use some of the terms more common to analytic sociology such as norms, authority, community, task, instrumental, role, socialization, etc. As we do this, the students' perception of the score changes. At first they see it as a unique and extraordinary type of social experience. After analyzing it sociologically they become aware of its similarity to any other types of more routine social experiences such as meetings, travelling, and work. They no longer focus only on the seemingly unacademic actions themselves but rather on the sociological contexts of those actions. Of course one of the advantages of using happenings is that the intensity of students' reactions to the incongruity of the unacademic actions in the academic situation makes it easier for them (and myself too) to remain cognizant of the analysis they provoke.

Scores such as this one are good for discussions of the pervasiveness of norms. Norms involving eye-contact, staring, queueing, and attention are among those evoked as illustrations. Also involved are norms of violation (of the instructions) and norms of reactions to violators. The flaccidity of physical action which results from the task-like nature of the activities provokes a discussion of the imperfect congruence of role and person. The playful and/or childish associations of some of the activities such as water-pouring and locomoting backward raise issues of socialization and the learning of appropriate behavior. The demands I make for full participation evoke ques-

tions of the nature and purpose of my authority and of authority in general. Full participation and the resultant collective feeling of having done it together are useful for launching discussions of community and of group. The tendencies to compliment others on how they carried out certain instructions and to deprecate one's own actions are related to issues of making status distinctions according to ability and to the pervasiveness of the quantification of prestige in our thoughts. The notion that the whole event was different, strange, or deviant, and that some or all of it was patently silly brings in discussions of how interpretations of specific situations relate to fundamental underlying values. Regularities in carrying out instructions which are not specified suggest emergent norms and the difference between intention and function.

Once general analytic points are made, I take the experience and place it in the context of relevant traditions. I like students to know that the terms of sociological analysis are an outgrowth of ongoing sociological traditions with their rich histories, that scores in particular and happenings in general have roots in specific artistic traditions, and that all these traditions have interplayed with aspects of the social structures and cultures in which they developed.

After application of the general mode and sources of sociological analysis, we aggregate the specific insights of the particular score. These might be about the imperfect relationship of rules and the actions which result from them, the accidental nature in which some specific social interactions arise along with the statistical likelihood that some actions of that type would occur, that human action is not always as purposive and rational as we might think, and that esthetic and other positive experiences result from the parameters of rule-governed situations.

After realizing the first score, the students are usually eager for more. I give them a few more scores similar to the first, except that I add instructions requiring intentional interaction among students. For example, I might include an instruction which says "a) Think of something you like. Go to some other participant in the score and tell that person 'I like \_\_\_\_\_.' b) When someone tells you 'I like \_\_\_\_\_.' reply to that person in a loud matter-of-fact tone of voice 'Gee, I'm glad you told me that.'"

After a couple of realizations, students have sufficient familiarity with scores to make up their own instructions. By the third score, I start including instructions which say "A) Make up an instruction which is in the spirit of this score. Put it in the instruction pile. It should be an instruction that anyone in the class can carry out. B) Take an instruction from the instruction pile, and realize it." Later, we create whole scores composed of their instructions.

After the first few weeks of the semester, the class is familiar with the concept and uses of scoring, and most of the students usually look forward to additional scores. Scoring then becomes a technique which we use for a number of different purposes. In some classes I ask students to create their own scores

in order to explore various aspects of social behavior or test some sociological propositions.

Scoring becomes so familiar to the class that we are able to create scores at any given moment to alter particular situations. For example, one day a student named Fred felt depressed and expressed a need for more attention. The class then created a "Score for Giving Fred Attention in Order to Make Him Feel Better." We set up a framework for a score, and wrote various instructions. These included:

- \*\*Give Fred two pats on the back, one handshake, and tell him that you like him.
- \*\*Give three cheers for Fred.
- \*\*Have one person sing and dance a song about Fred.
- \*\*Clean his glasses for him.

After the realization was over Fred said he felt much better. I asked him to elaborate upon his feelings and to describe why he thought they came about. I was able to lead the discussion into an analysis of the abstract topic "the individual and the group." I used the score to demonstrate that individuals' mental states can be a function of their integration into groups.

Scores can also be used as rituals to celebrate and affirm the class-members as a communality. I often use a "Farewell Score" to do this on the last day of class. The instructions ask each person to rise, one at a time, and make a final verbal presentation to the group. Upon finishing s/he leaves the room, and the next person rises and follows suit. This continues until everyone in the class including myself has made a presentation. The last person, having been the only one who has heard all the presentations, now speaks to an empty room. As each person leaves the course is over for her/him. Unlike the other scores, this one is not followed by a professionally inspired analysis. Rather, it is hoped, and this is borne out by reports from individual students whom I have had in subsequent courses, that the students are sufficiently familiar with scores, so that the lessons of the "Farewell Score" are apparent without me or someone else having to spell them out.

## CONCLUSION

Using scoring and other kinds of seemingly nonacademic events effects a permanent change in the social structure of the classroom for that particular course. Scores have some of the properties of experimental theater, of

children's play, of multi-media events, of religious rituals and of birthday parties. The feeling for these kinds of events carry over into the more conventional periods of the class. Students know there is always the possibility that on any given day and at any time, we may decide to create a score, fill an elevator full of balloons, or chant a line of Durkheim as a mantra. They know that they might have to get up out of their seats, make noises, and perform nonutilitarian tasks, and that their instructor will be alongside them doing the same. I observe that this increases their commitment to the course. They find that there is the *Gemeinschaft* of unusual shared experience on a regular basis. The course develops its own subculture and their inquiry into the justifications for my procedures develop into both their collective theory and collective myth about the course and my role in it. I remain an authority figure, and use my authority to encourage the students to immerse themselves in the curriculum of the course.

I have used scores and other happenings in such diverse courses as Sociological Analysis, Community, Small Groups, Methods, History of Sociological Thought, etc. I have no multiple regression analysis to prove it, but I believe my use of scores has helped to make me a better sociology teacher. It has certainly helped me and my students to derive pleasure from our situations together, and I think this is worthwhile in itself.

## NOTES

1. Presented at the annual convention of the Mid-South Sociological Association on November 2, 1978. The author thanks Vaughn Grisham, Robert Young and Vaneeta D'Andrea for their suggestions and encouragement.
2. Many of my ideas came from the experimental art-form called happenings which flourished between 1958 and 1964. Standard references include Al Hansen's *A Primer of Happenings and Time/Space Art* (New York: Something Else Press, 1965), Allan Kaprow's *Assemblages, Happenings, and Environments* (New York: Abrams, 1966), and Michael Kirby's *Happenings* (New York: Dutton, 1965).
3. I learned "scoring" from Marilyn Wood. I was a member of her dance company, The Celebrations Group, in 1972. She was influenced by Ann Halprin. Some of Halprin's ideas are included in Lawrence Halprin's *The RSVP Cycles: Creative Processes in the Human Environment* (New York: Braziller, 1969).
4. This particular score, with some modifications, was first realized on February 27, 1974.