

1-1-1997

Intervention in the Classroom: A Cautionary Tale

Melodye Lehnerer

Southwest Missouri State University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/csr>

Recommended Citation

Lehnerer, Melodye (1997) "Intervention in the Classroom: A Cautionary Tale," *Clinical Sociology Review*: Vol. 15: Iss. 1, Article 9.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/csr/vol15/iss1/9>

This Teaching Notes is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@WayneState. It has been accepted for inclusion in Clinical Sociology Review by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@WayneState.

Intervention in the Classroom: A Cautionary Tale

Melodye Lehmerer
Southwest Missouri State University
Springfield, Missouri 65804

ABSTRACT

"A careful analysis of the teacher-student relationship at any level, inside or outside the school, reveals its fundamentally narrative character. . . The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. . . The outstanding characteristic of the narrative education, then, is the sonority of words, not their transforming power" (Freire 1984: 57). Guided by a commitment to the accuracy of Freire's appraisal of the student-teacher relationship, I decided to practice a "liberating pedagogy" in my classroom. My report on this action shows that students are often less than receptive to such pedagogical strategies. Their lack of receptivity is explored, leading to the humbling fact that intervention in the classroom is a fragile process.

There is a rich history of pedagogues attempting to create "appreciation" for the "other" in their classrooms. Some report what I have labeled "small interventions." For example, Karlene Faith when teaching a class on "American Criminal Justice and Minority Groups" states that her students, criminal justice system workers, were "generally open to the subject" and in the end "most of us involved came through the experience with heightened sensitivity" (1977:64-67). Similarly, Ray Michalowski (1977) when reporting his practicing of "a gentle pedagogy" with criminology students from a conservative Southern milieu found its effects to be mixed: some students remained committed to a "strict individualistic ideology," some adapted a

"liberalized view of the justice system," and some became guided by a "vague humanism." Other pedagogues have reported their interventions to be more successful. Jan Mayer (1986) claims that the use of an "emotive pedagogy" enabled Anglophone students to make a cognitive-affective link with Francophone separatists. Similarly, Mark Chesler and Ximena Zuniga when conducting the "pink triangle exercise" found that their form of "active pedagogy" was reported by students to be a "highly positive learning experience" (1991:179).

Given these reports of others, it is obvious that teaching about controversial subjects in the classroom is not novel nor is attempting to raise student awareness of the "other." But unlike many of my predecessors I have labeled my tale a cautionary one. I do this to remind my colleagues in teaching that we must be aware of our limitations. Our passion to intervene in the lives of our students must be tempered with humility and patience. My tale unfolds using "dramatic recall" (Van Maanen 1988). This storytelling strategy is intended to engage the imagination of the reader and involve one in the experience, both affective and cognitive, of the storyteller. This story takes place during my first year at a Midwest Regional University. As is typical of the newcomer's role I was assigned courses which were already scheduled. The story takes place over a one semester period and involves seventy-three students (two sections) who were taking an elective 300-level course entitled, "Social Deviance."

Pedagogical Positioning

I begin this cautionary tale by clarifying my position on the function of education and the role of the teacher which is implied by this function. Taking guidance from the Brazilian educator and revolutionary Paulo Freire, I state that the function of education is twofold. First, education should stimulate a critical awareness in the student of social group life. Second, once awareness is raised, education should encourage the expression of this awareness in the transforming of those social arrangements which are identified as unjust and oppressive. Under these circumstances the role of the teacher is not to produce students who are conforming and accepting of the status quo system. Rather, the role of the teacher is to create in students an "uneasiness and discomfort" which helps them recognize a system of power differences socially constructed by interest groups (Pfohl 1980). As illustrated in my course description which follows, teaching social deviance is an excellent arena in which the issues of conformity, deviation, and transformation can be brought to critical awareness.

Many courses in the study of deviance focus upon rule breaking behavior (prostitution, drug use, suicide, mental illness, etc.) as if these behaviors were objectively given. The basic assumption behind these courses is that

the identifying of deviant behavior represents a moral consensus on the part of society, that deviant behavior once identified can be treated as a topic or an issue. In such courses, the cause of deviance is the result of a pathological state - in the individual, in the individual's immediate surroundings, or in society-at-large. The focus of this course will be quite different. . . Rather than identify cause, the major focus of this course will be to identify how behavior becomes defined as deviant. . . Once this process is understood, the political implications of the deviance producing and deviance maintaining business of society will be investigated (Lehnerer, syllabus, 1995).

When reviewing the syllabus with students, I state that I think the course should be entitled, "The Sociology of Difference," rather than "Social Deviance." I make this distinction because social difference can be interpreted as nonhierarchical and nonjudgmental whereas social deviance implies the opposite. In addition, I make it clear that my awareness of difference is based upon involvement in "real world" problems and therefore I speak as an academic who has come down from the "ivory tower." I do this for several reasons. First, I find support for my action in a rich history of sociologists who began their social inquiries with the question, "Whose side are we on?" and answered in the affirmative - the side of the disenfranchised, the powerless, and the socially stigmatized (Becker 1966). Second, in an era of discipline-wide conservatism (Sjoberg and Vaughan 1993) I want students to know that teachers can be passionate about their subject matter and that passion leads to action. Third, I explain that my passion comes from working as a clinical sociologist. In this practitioner role I have worked with social groups who were systematically denied access to not only their civil rights, but often their human dignity. Lastly, I ensure students that I do not intend to convert them to my view but to expose them to it. A view which quoting Stephen Pfohl is intended, "to teach the troubling awareness that the study of deviance is first and foremost the study of the way people struggle to gain, maintain, or resist the authorized domination of others" (1980:250). I close my introduction to the course by telling students that my academic training in sociology was a mix of Marxism, symbolic interactionism, and variants of "underdog sociology." These perspectives tend to encourage self-reflection, a general questioning of the conventional, and advocacy. For six years I had taken this course of action at a Southwest Metropolitan University. It had worked well as reflected in high student evaluations buttressed with positive anecdotal feedback.

Reality Check

When interviewing for my current position in a criminal justice program, I received several warning signs that I needed to adjust my presentation of self in the classroom. For example, while interviewing with one faculty

member, I was told that the course I had taught on "gender, stigma, and social control" was a "fluff" course. Since gender issues were becoming an integral part of most criminal justice programs, this statement caught me off guard. I went to the library to "check out" the facility and found carved into the wooden study desks such epithets as "nigger go home" and "faggots die." On the last day of my interview schedule, I was invited to a women's university-wide faculty group and participated in a ritual designed to purge the evil spirits of a heterosexist patriarchal administration. The most significant message that I ignored was the changing composition of the student body I would be teaching.

The students I had been teaching were older adults taking upper division classes. These students represented a variety of experiences related to age, gender, class, sexual orientation, and occupation. As adults who were working and raising families they experienced, as well as observed, the small injustices of everyday life. Discussing and thinking about the structural and cultural sources of these injustices had some basis in reality for them. But, in my new position I was introduced to a different type of student - one whose life experiences were minimal and whose commitment to conservatism and the status quo was intense. This situation was aggravated by the fact that the majority of these students were criminal justice minors focused on employment in law enforcement. In addition, these students had become accustomed to a teaching style which required that they "show up and listen to lecture half awake, memorize enough class material to pass a weekly quiz, and take two multiple choice tests." Under these circumstances "education becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat" (Freire 1984:58). I was determined to counter this "banking deposit approach" to education by practicing a liberating education which as the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire states "consists in acts of cognition [and] transfers of information. . . through dialogue" (1984:67). Unfortunately, students who have a view of education as a means of obtaining employment rather than a tool to see the world in a critically aware way are often reluctant to participate in Freire's liberating education. But, as Freire points out, "Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge" (Freire 1984:68).

The Challenge: Emotive Media

To challenge students both cognitively and emotionally, I used popular media. Based on past experience, I had found popular media, as opposed to "factual" material produced by "educators," to be both provocative and a

catalyst for dialogue (Lehnerer 1987; Lehnerer 1992). One of my early successes came with the watching of a debate over the right to choose. This debate between Randall Terry of Operation Rescue and Faye Waddelton of Planned Parenthood illustrated well the actions of a moral entrepreneur who was on a holy crusade (Becker 1963). It also, in this case, made it clear to even the most committed pro-life members of the class that Terry's political agenda was infused with mysogynism. In outlining his "reform" agenda Terry stated that women who become pregnant as a consequence of rape must continue the pregnancy, that the birth control pill "kills new life" and must be banned, and that once abortion is made illegal again those "few women who may die seeking abortions are expendable." This media influenced experience did not necessarily create an instance of "moral movement" but it did create an awareness that even those presenting themselves as "moral" leaders should be evaluated from a critical perspective.

When the class moved into the discussion of stigma, I informed them that the class exemplar would be the emerging political activities of gays and lesbians. I identified three reasons in regard to my choice of topic. First, homosexuality as a topic of analysis fit well a changing definition of rule breaking behavior from sin to medical model to the politics of deviance. The consequences of stigmatization varied with each definitional change. Sin led to death and eternal damnation. Disease led to therapy and correction. And, political activism led to legitimacy and acceptance. Second, my membership on the Metropolitan Gay and Lesbian Alliance Board (MGLA) gave me firsthand experience with gay activism and resistance to stigmatization. And, third, my interventionist work as a clinical sociologist with the caretakers, family members, and friends of people both living with and dying of AIDS had made me quite aware of the consequences (personal and social structural) of stigmatization. For example, those who are HIV positive have limited access to adequate health care. In the event of death, their family and friends discover that undertakers will not provide burial services. And, those caretakers who do provide services to those who are HIV positive are often shunned by "normal" society.

As the weeks of the semester passed I continually used illustrations of gay and lesbian experiences in terms of stigma, consequences of stigma, and stigma management (Goffman 1963). This set the stage for a "politics of deviance" analysis as outlined by Schur (1980).

Deviance issues are inherently political. They revolve around some people's assessments of other people's behavior. And power is a crucial factor in determining which and whose assessments gain an ascendancy. Deviance policies, likewise, affect the distribution of power and always have some broad political significance. (1980:xi).

Students graciously tolerated my illustrations and again through anecdotal feedback some seemed open to thinking about homosexuals as a stigmatized and oppressed group. But, the majority of students were simply not open to rethinking their strict fundamentalist Christian backgrounds in regard to homosexuality. It was inherently wrong and had nothing to do with the activities of moral entrepreneurs seeking to convert "personal problems" to "public issues." I needed a hook to challenge students to move from an ideological stance characterized by two principles of correctional conservatism: 1) a rational choice assumption about rule breaking focused on the individual, not the social context; and, 2) a law and order response (punish and/or correct) to such willful rule breaking behavior. I decided to use as my visual hook a HBO produced documentary (1994) entitled, "Why Am I Gay?" This documentary featured a New York police officer and his experiences as a gay man growing up and moving into a heterosexual occupation.

As the police officer talked about his childhood, his coming out experience, support from his family, and the mixed reactions of his co-workers, the class was attentive. I was sure I had made my point. It was during the closing scene in which the officer, while watching an old romance film on television, kissed his boyfriend that I clearly observed a tension in the class. I cannot pretend ignorance that this might happen for I had actually discussed with other faculty members whether I should show this scene. There is no doubt that I could have made my point about the consequences of stigma at both the individual and structural levels of experience without showing what later became "the kiss." But both I and my "advisors" thought it was validating conventional thinking about the inappropriateness of homosexual relationships if I did not show the clip in its entirety. After all, if my intent was to create moral movement, then the normal activity of lovers watching romance films and inspired to kiss because of the film content, needed to be observed. In addition, my action illustrated that "normals" in society have to be a part of the "normalization" process through facilitation if social definitions of deviance are to be changed (Davis 1961). The ultimate point was that if the couple we were observing had been heterosexual, their kiss would have been taken for granted.

The negative reactions from the class were profound. They ranged anywhere from statements such as "gross," and/or "disgusting" to body language such as twisting in their seats or turning their faces away. Since this particular learning experience came close to the end of the semester, I was disappointed. Several weeks (twelve) of problem posing pedagogy had apparently made no impact. In fact it appeared as though "the capacity to empathize and thus comprehend the subject of inquiry" had not occurred (Matza 1969:15). I decided to test out this dismal conclusion by including in

the upcoming class test the following short essay question:

In the case of the primary deviant, stigmatization is transmitted informally and may result in self-labeling. Discuss this statement and use as your illustration the reactions of the class to the police officer and his boyfriend kissing in the film clip, "Why Am I Gay?" (Lehnerer, take home test, Spring, 1995).

In formulating this test question, I assumed that those students who actually put themselves in the role of the other would realize that the responses in class were an example of the informal transfer of stigmatization. Such an understanding of this classroom experience would be proof of moral movement. Moral movement, according to Matza (1969), occurs when one adopts a social understanding that is appreciative rather than correctional. Such an ability is vital when studying the deviance producing process of society because an appreciative perspective engages the deviant phenomenon/subject through empathy. Empathy reduces social distance and consequently enables the social researcher to become appreciative of human diversity and the complexity of society in which it exists (1969:10). In contrast, a correctional perspective maintains social distance because it "systematically interferes with the capacity to empathize and thus comprehend the subject of inquiry" (1969:15).

Student Responses

Using content analysis and Matza's emphasis on the importance of appreciation in regard to moral movement (reducing social distance) three categories of student responses were identified. These responses fell along a continuum from confirmation of a distancing position already taken (social distancing maintained) to minimum moral movement (social distancing recognized) to serious self-reflection (social distancing recognized and personally addressed). For example, if a student stated disapproval of homosexuality, it was considered evidence that social distance had been maintained and appreciation of human diversity had not been elicited by course material. In contrast, I identified a response which included an indication of social distancing being recognized, such as self reflection on how others might experience symbolic labeling, as a sign of movement toward an appreciation of human diversity. In addition, if a student implied some change in personal attitude/belief, or at least a questioning of some personal attitude/belief, I have identified this as evidence of moral movement in the direction of being more inclined towards Matza's definition of appreciation and therefore reducing social distance. I would like to add that there were responses in which it was evident that the student had entered the

class with an appreciative perspective. A typical response from such a student would read:

- The police officer, in his primary deviant state, may self-label himself because of all the negative definitions and stigma by society toward gays and lesbians. These negative definitions are transmitted through derogatory comments, through conversation, media images, jokes, and everyday language. In this case, how the class (not I) reacted was what the cop had probably experienced--for example, snickers, looking away, jeers, sighs, laughs, etc.--which in turn lead him to label himself as bad, different, not normal.

The first student response listed in each category illustrates best the point I am making. Those responses that follow do not include the full answer to the question. I have only included the affective responses of students to give the reader a taste of the emotional energy which was generated by this class experience.

Confirmation of Position: Social Distancing Maintained

The key to the following group of responses is that appreciation as defined by Matza (1969) has not been elicited; and, that, in fact, an existing belief that homosexuality is wrong has been confirmed by the class experience of viewing the film clip.

- Stigmatization is informally transmitted in four ways: 1) derogatory comments, 2) jokes, 3) media images, and 4) everyday language. The class responded in each of these four ways. In terms of derogatory comments, some responded with "damn faggots and queers." Jokes were thrown around about the officer showering with the others and him dropping the soap. Media images of gay men are effeminate, weak men, not the type we saw, young, strong police officers. Everyday language was used in terms of "he walks like a faggot, which one is the woman." These responses came during the scene when the couple was walking through town. Several females in our class had trouble watching the screen because it "made me sick."
- I was appalled, and almost physically sick. However, I really do try not to force my opinions onto anybody else. I, and many class members, hold the opinion that if they want to do that, it's their life and their business. But they shouldn't try to force *their* views on us, either.
- Relating this to the film on why am I gay, the men began kissing and a string of silence came over the class. You could have dropped a pin and

we would have jumped but eventually there was some outburst and we started talking about how disgusting it was.

- Regarding the film clip "Why Am I Gay?", the reactions of the male students were a little different than those of the female students. The male students were really offended and disgusted by the kiss, because it was done by the same sex as them. I think that most of them may have thought, even for half a second, of themselves kissing other guys. The females did not respond as loudly as the males because it was the opposite sex that was doing the kissing. They were still disgusted by it, but they were able to "stomach" it a little better than the guys.
- During the film "Why Am I Gay," when the police officer and his boyfriend kissed, the class reacted with sounds of disgust and hushed whispers. Most acted as if they had never seen anything like that before and definitely never wanted to again.
- The reactions of the class to the film clip, "Why Am I Gay?" showed that many people may say that they have no problem with homosexuals, but when it comes to actually seeing a gay couple kiss, their socialization breaks in and takes over their behavior. The reaction of the class definitely creates a stigma and a label of homosexuality being wrong, or something that is not fully acceptable in our heterosexual world.

Change in Position: Social Distancing Recognized

The key to the following group of responses is that social distance has in some way been reduced. Students clearly express that they "can understand from another's perspective." Understanding does not mean approval but it does show evidence of an attempt to "genuinely hear what others are saying, an attempt to fathom the subjective realities that those speaking reflect" (Michalowski 1977:70). In practical terms, "it means exploring and seeking to comprehend in a non-judgmental fashion the life experiences of [others]" (Michalowski 1977:70).

- The reactions of the class to that film is a beautiful example of how one can easily fall into a self-labeling type of situation. A primary deviant such as a homosexual still in the closet must not only deal with the fact that they know they are deviant in society's terms, but also with the prospect of what would happen if they came out of the closet. Seeing the reaction of the class to this film probably would not help an individual in such a situation. The reaction of the class, which I might add is a social deviance class (should be more tolerant than the average situation),

would be a definite indicator to a homosexual still in the closet, that he or she is not all right. In fact, they would probably feel much worse about themselves than before. This is all part of the negative self-labeling process that goes on for a primary deviant.

- The primary deviant is one that keeps their deviant acts in secret. This was illustrated by the reaction the class had when the two lovers kissed. The class made derogatory statements to show their dislikes towards gays. There were mixed emotions; some sighed, laughed or turned their heads. A few made their comments known by stating, "This is making me sick" and "How gross." If I was gay sitting in class, I wouldn't come out and admit that I was gay.
- In the case of the class reactions to the gay officer and his boyfriend kissing, you can see how someone would begin to self-label. There may have been a homosexual sitting in class. As soon as the class began to respond so negatively to something they feel natural about, they would in turn, negatively label themselves. The derogatory comments and noises in class only reinforces their feeling of deviancy supported by mainstream society. This will lead to guilt and shame on the behalf of the homosexual which eventually perpetuates the sad and ignorant state of homophobia.
- The reactions of the class reflects the majority of societal reactions. Cooley's looking glass self explains the self-labeling that homosexuals experience. The first concept is that of "imagining one's appearance to others," the second, "imagining one's appearance being evaluated by others," and, "experiencing a self-feeling based on the evaluation of others." If, for example, there was a homosexual in the classroom witnessing the reactions, they would imagine that they appear the same as the officer. Since the reaction of the class was negative they would assume they were being evaluated the same way.

Position Reflected Upon: Social Distancing Recognized and Addressed

Responses placed in this category reflect not only evidence of appreciation but a conscious effort to reflect on personal behavior. Unlike the prior series of student responses, students not only reflected on the behavior of others but seriously reflected on their own behavior/actions.

- The film concerning the homosexual police officer was very interesting, to say the least. . . I conducted a sort of an informal poll of the class (at least those students I normally associate with). Before I go into what I

found, I feel it is important to discuss my personal views on the matter. I realize that as a professional social worker, I am going to have to learn to deal with and counsel many different types of people—not the least of which will be homosexual people. I don't anticipate any problems in maintaining a professional distance from my inner feelings about homosexuality. I will have to realize that part of being a social worker is accepting many different lifestyles without making a judgment about their lifestyle. Now, I will tell you how I felt about the scenes leading up to the male-male kiss in the movie. When I saw the two men sitting in the chair together, getting steadily more and more familiar with each other, I started to feel very uncomfortable. By the time they were approaching the smooch, I was about ready to make some gagging noises to express how disgusted I was with what I was watching, but I felt that would be rude and that I might offend the heterosexually-disadvantaged people that might be in the classroom. I was almost ready to walk out of the room in disgust at what I was seeing. All of the classmates I talked with shared the same feelings I did—disgust. I don't think you could have picked a better film to make people look at their feelings about homosexuality right in the face.

- Because of public treatment of people that do not fit into the so-called normal society, they are made to feel as if they are breaking rules. When part of the class moaned and groaned when the gay men kissed, they show every other person in the room that the label gay is wrong. This shows gay people that they are not accepted. The people like myself who see nothing wrong with being gay also don't do anything to help. I just sat there silent, because people who don't have a problem with gay people do not cheer to show support.
- In the case of the primary deviant, stigmatization is transmitted informally and may result in self-labeling. When the film clip "Why Am I Gay?" was shown in class, students' reactions to the police officer and his boyfriend kissing in the film clip were obvious. There was a moan of disapproval as some people looked in a different direction, put their heads down on their desks, shook their heads in rejection; snickers and moans were all informal reactions to that scene. All of this body language from the class is informal stigmatization. I cannot imagine the way a closeted homosexual in our class could have felt as this stigmatization is transmitted directly at them. This self-labeling that a primary deviant might go through must be devastating to a person. It's a shame our society must stigmatize these people for something that is not their fault. I figure life would be absolutely boring and unbearable without diversity

among us.

In sum, a majority of students reported that they and their classmates were "appalled and almost physically sick" because of what they had seen. Students by relating these affective reactions (self and other) established that they were unable to reduce the social distance between themselves and homosexuals. Nonetheless, their reactions, regardless of category placement, did reflect an ability to apply the concept, "informal transformation of stigma." Application of an abstract concept to a personal experience is indicative of reflexive thinking (Friedrichs 1987). Although appreciation may not have been achieved, awareness of participation in the stigmatizing process was.

Self-Reflection: What Went Wrong?

I claimed that my goal was moral movement and that my method to achieve this goal was Freire's critical pedagogy. If my goal was not achieved, there are three possible explanations: 1) the goal was unrealistic, 2) the social actors involved were not committed to equality nor to the abolition of privilege, and/or 3) the principles of a critical pedagogy were not followed. In regard to the goal of this learning experience, I wanted to raise students' awareness of the experience of a minority group, specifically gays and lesbians (D'emilio 1983). In addition, I wanted them to be aware of the social construction of homosexuality and the political implications related to this social construction. Given the course content, social deviance, and the theme, the politics of deviance, the goal was fitting. In addition, it was reasonable on my part to expect that awareness would lead to empathy. But, I was using as my pedagogical guide, Freire, who consistently claims that awareness of a problem is not an end in itself but rather becomes a "motivating force" which leads to a transformation of self and society (1984:34). In short, my goal was not the problem. Therefore, I must look to social actors present and principles applied for an explanation of my failure.

If we apply Freire's model to the social situation in my classroom the social actors present were unlikely to experience heterosexuality as a problem in their everyday lives. As a matter of fact the hegemony of heterosexuality so permeated their everyday lives that it became a mechanism by which they were "inert beneficiaries" of a society which privileges heterosexuality over homosexuality (Phillips 1991). Why should the privileged involve themselves in serious self-reflection about their privilege, especially if it might lead to the loss of privilege? This fact is verified by the student response cited earlier which stated that, "I, and many class members, hold the opinion that if they want to do that, it's their life and their business." Compare this student's statement to Freire's description of oppression:

Any situation in which 'A' objectively exploits 'B' or hinders his pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression. Such a situation in itself constitutes violence, even when sweetened by false generosity, because it interferes with man's ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human (Freire 1984:40-41).

Clearly this student (and those represented by this student's response) had not taken an appreciative perspective. Rather, this student was expressing a form of "subtle heterosexism" which leaves unchallenged heterosexual privilege (Phillips 1991:461). In my attempt to "soften the power of the oppressor in deference to the weakness of the oppressed" a false generosity (individualism) had emerged. An unjust social order is the permanent fount of this generosity (Freire 1984:28-29).

The most telling mistake I made was my lack of adherence to the principles of a liberating pedagogy: 1) identifying and naming the problem, 2) analyzing the causes of the problem, and 3) finding solutions to the problem (Freire 1984; Smith and Alschuler 1976; Solorzano 1989). In the naming phase, Solorzano states that the educator enters the community or social setting, learns about the major issues and problems of the area, and after gathering the needed information, develops generative codes which are visual renditions (pictures, drawings, stories, articles, or films) of the problem (1989:218). I did not do this. Rather, I "deposited" a problem based upon my experience with the Metropolitan Gay and Lesbian Alliance. This politically active group of which I was a contributing member had identified two major areas of concern for the metropolitan gay and lesbian community: 1) poor relations with the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and 2) the negative impact of the state sodomy law on employment opportunities. These two concerns emerged out of a discrimination suit against the MPD brought by a lesbian police officer. The members of the Board decided to address these dual concerns by implementing three social actions: 1) create a more friendly working environment for gay and lesbian police officers through cultural sensitivity workshops, 2) establish better relations between Metropolitan police officers and members of the gay and lesbian community through community outreach programs, and 3) have the sodomy law of the state declared unconstitutional through political mobilization. Although the problem I introduced had possible relevance to students seeking law enforcement employment, I nevertheless chose the class content, enforced my choice (class materials) and expected students who were not consulted to adapt to it (Freire 1984:59). In short, my actions were those of a "banking deposit" educator. Consequently, this action led to failure in phase two of Freire's pedagogy.

In the second or analytic phase, the problem which has been identified

and codified is analyzed by means of dialogue between the teacher and the students. This dialogue never took place because I had not resolved the "teacher-student contradiction":

Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students. This solution is not (nor can it be) found in the banking concept. On the contrary, banking education maintains and even stimulates the contradiction through attitudes and practices which mirror oppressive society as a whole (Freire 1984:59).

Based upon my "expertise" the students were told what the problem was. Without ownership and dialogue I unrealistically assumed that students who were members of the "oppressor class" could imagine themselves being denied the right to work because of their sexual orientation. A second and more realistic assumption was that students could place themselves in a social situation in which they could recognize the discriminatory consequences (for the other) of social distancing. But the class example, homosexuality, was so threatening to their heterosexual identities that cognitive imaginings of either scenario were blocked by emotional reactions.

Chesler and Zuniga report similar findings from their "pink triangle exercise" (1991). In this exercise, homophobia was identified by the educators as a problem and the experiential exercise of wearing a pink triangle for one day was their way of having students experience this problem. Chesler and Zuniga chose this experience and this particular symbol because it has both historical and contemporary significance. Historically, the pink triangle was used to identify gays and lesbians confined in the concentration camps of Nazi Germany (Lautmann 1980-1981). Today this symbol has become part of the personal and political identification process of the gay and lesbian movements (Chesler and Zuniga 1991:174). These educators report that "the majority of students undertook the exercise eagerly and seriously as a means to explore their own feelings and the reactions of other" (1991:174). But, they did experience resistance:

It [the exercise] significantly distracted me to the point where I was unable to perform what I was doing at the time. In my opinion, this distraction was due to both self-consciousness and my position on the homosexual issue. I neither support nor sympathize with the homosexual cause. Actually, as a Christian, I oppose homosexuality (1991:174).

In the solution phase, students in collaboration with the teacher identify and implement solutions to the problem. Unlike Chesler and Zuniga, I did not have an exercise which required students to reflect on a problem (homophobia) and then take a social action (wearing the pink triangle) in

regard to that problem. For those who risked taking that social action, transformation of self and society became possible. What I did have was a test question which asked students to document their participation in a social action which did not transform but rather oppressed. Consequently, I did not create a learning environment in which students, if inclined towards empathy, felt confident enough "to cheer and show support." Rather, I created an environment which achieved the opposite effect. As one student so wisely pointed out, "I just sat there silent."

Concluding Statement

By presenting my tale of the classroom I have begun to tap into a larger pedagogical issue, specifically, what is the purpose of education? Is it as Freire claims, to produce a person who is free, free to transform society at two levels of experience - individual and structural? Or, is the function of education in the 1990s to produce a skilled, but docile worker, who will move into the work force uncritical of the way social organizations operate to squelch challenge, diversity, and change? For me, this pedagogical issue has become even more salient. Because I am responsible for the criminal justice internship program, I cannot indulge myself in strictly philosophical issues related to pedagogy. I am supervising students who sincerely anticipate that their education will lead to employment in the criminal justice system. Gatekeepers of this system may be less than receptive to individuals who are willing to question authority or speak out when organizational policy produces unfair treatment. In response to this ethical dilemma I find solace and support in the insights of Stephen Pfohl (1980). In commenting on the ethics of teaching a critical criminology Pfohl states that:

If the student is provided with more than a simple knowledge about criminal law, the criminal, and criminal control, then the awareness that each either contributes to or reflects the presence of social injustice becomes inevitable. From the vantage point of this awareness students will have the analytical skills to contribute in some small but concrete way to the formation of a critical community of persons whose actions can lead to the humanization of political structures (1980:255).

My tale, though cautionary, is not intended to paralyze. By chronicling those contingencies that can lead to a failed attempt, I have made the reader cognizant of those contingencies under which a liberating pedagogy is most likely to succeed. To make my point I close with an update on my current teaching situation.

Although my primary teaching load is corrections courses in the criminal justice program, I do teach the introductory course to the interdisciplinary minor in gender studies. The teaching of this course has completely altered

the contingencies under which I experienced the previously reported set back. The gender studies minor attracts students with very different characteristics than those I described in the social deviance class. These gender studies students are primarily women of varying ages, liberal in their political orientation, and willing to self-disclose in regard to what they believe to be personal problems. Their willingness to engage in dialogue achieves Freire's horizontal relationship between persons and resolves the teacher-student contradiction (1980:45). In addition, I have gained a reputation on campus for conducting a "gay friendly" class. Consequently, I have gay and lesbian students who are comfortable enough to share their "personal problems" with the class. Their presence sets the stage in which the hegemony of heterosexuality can be: 1) posed as a problem, 2) analyzed in terms of how and why society privileges heterosexuality, and 3) allows collaborative problem solving to take place. My students and I have become "jointly responsible for a process in which all grow" (Freire 1984:67).

References

- Becker, Howard. 1963. *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. New York: The Free Press.
- _____. 1966. "Whose Side Are We On?" *Social Problems* 14:239-247.
- Chesler, Mark and Ximena Zuniga. 1991. "Dealing with Prejudice and Conflict in the Classroom: The Pink Triangle Exercise." *Teaching Sociology* 19:173-181.
- Davis, Fred. 1961. "Deviance Disavowal: The Management of Strained Interaction by the Visibly Handicapped." *Social Problems* 9:120-132.
- D'emilio, John. 1983. *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Faith, Karlene. 1977. "Learning to Teach: Radical Education and Criminal Justice System Workers." *Crime and Social Justice* 5:63-68.
- Freire, Paulo. 1984. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. NY: Continuum.
- Friedrichs, David. 1987. "Bringing Ourselves Back In: The Reflexive Dimension in Teaching A Humanist Sociology." *Teaching Sociology* 15:1-6.
- Goffman, Erving. 1963. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- HBO America Undercover Series. 1994. "Why Am I Gay?" New York.
- Lautmann, R. 1980-1981. "The Pink Triangle: The Persecution of Homosexual Males in Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany." *Journal of Homosexuality* 6:141-160.
- Lehnerer, Melodye. 1987. "Popular Culture in the Classroom." *Canadian Woman Studies/Les Cahiers De La Femme* 8:41-43.
- _____. 1992. "Becoming Involved: Field Research at a Halfway House for Ex-offenders." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, York University.
- Matza, David. 1969. *Becoming Deviant*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Mayer, Jan. 1986. "Teaching Critical Awareness In An Introductory Course." *Teaching Sociology* 14:249-256.
- Michalowski, Ray. 1977. "A Gentle Pedagogy: Teaching Critical Criminology in the South." *Crime and Social Justice* 5:69-73.
- Pfohl, Stephen. 1980. "Teaching Critical Criminology: The Ethical Issues." Pp. 245-256 in *Radical Criminology: The Coming Crises*, edited by James Inciardi. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

- Phillips, Sarah Rengle. 1991. "The Hegemony of Heterosexuality: A Study of Introductory Texts." *Teaching Sociology* 19:454-463.
- Schur, Edwin. 1980. *The Politics of Deviance: Stigma Contests and the Uses of Power*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Sjoberg, Gideon and Ted R. Vaughan. 1993. "The Ethical Foundations of Sociology and the Necessity for a Human Rights Alternative." Pp. 114-159 in *A Critique of American Sociology*, edited by Ted R. Vaughan, Gideon Sjoberg, and Larry T. Reynolds. Dix Hills, N.Y.: General Hall.
- Smith, William, and Alfred Alschuler. 1976. "How to Measure Freire's Stages of Conscientizacao: The C Code Manual." Unpublished manuscript, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.
- Solorzano, Daniel G. 1989. "Teaching and Social Change: Reflections on a Freirean Approach In A College Classroom." *Teaching Sociology* 17:218-225.
- Van Maanen, John. 1988. *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.