"Igniting Student’s Sociological Imagination through Collecting Oral Histories of the Homeless"  
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“Sociological imagination is a quality of mind that cannot be adopted by simply teaching students its discernive assumptions. Rather, it is a disposition, in competition with other forms of sensibility, which can be acquired only when it is practiced” (Kebbede, 2009: 353).

**ABSTRACT**

Collecting oral histories is an important pedagogical tool because it has the potential to make the listener hear “the voice” of the marginalized. Students learn to practice their sociological imagination when they are engaged in a valuable experiential learning. This is a quality of mind, a way of seeing and knowing. It is like recollection of old habits, where a person thinks that their troubles are simply not repeated as experienced by others, thus they are happening in a void not in a structure and system of inequality. It is seeing the big picture, a revelation, or seeing the forest not a singular tree. Students who developed a sociological imagination can “distinguish between personal troubles and social issues,” recognize “things that may seem unimportant and trivial” (Miller 2000: 121).

To impart what is meant by this concept, beyond the simple recognition of an intersection between biography and social structure, a transformative consciousness experience is needed and in collecting oral histories one may listen, empathize, experience the lives of others. The current project is based on the premise that “**in stories the stories come alive**” (Dorson 1989:6). The stories are accounts of lived, emotional experience... “they anchor the teller of the story into being part of the “narrated world” the teller is creating” (Miller 2000: 122). Stories (2000) thought that developing a sociological imagination may take place through story-telling, and based on the premise that story-telling, when paired with inquiry and dialogue, can promote change. Students gain the fullest sense of the sociological imagination, one that includes social responsibility, when “they are able to have encounters and experiences that challenge their pre-existing world-views and allows them to see first-hand the sociological concepts they learn in the classroom” (Hirtenstein-Werdt & Wallace 2005: 76).

**RATIONAL**

Sociology students are introduced to the term “sociological imagination” in the very first unit of our Introduction to Sociology courses. The sociology department has one specific sub-competency that states: “Appraise the impact of the social and physical environment on individual experience.” To impart what it means by this concept, beyond the simple recognition of an intersection between biography and social structure, a transformative consciousness experience is needed and in collecting oral histories one may listen, empathize, experience the lives of others. The current project is based on the premise that “**in stories the stories come alive**” (Dorson 1989:6). The stories are accounts of lived, emotional experience... “they anchor the teller of the story into being part of the “narrated world” the teller is creating” (Miller 2000: 122). Stories (2000) thought that developing a sociological imagination may take place through story-telling, and based on the premise that story-telling, when paired with inquiry and dialogue, can promote change. Students gain the fullest sense of the sociological imagination, one that includes social responsibility, when “they are able to have encounters and experiences that challenge their pre-existing world-views and allows them to see first-hand the sociological concepts they learn in the classroom” (Hirtenstein-Werdt & Wallace 2005: 76).

**SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

• Using the sociological imagination via student’s critical reflections throughout the semester, their sense of social responsibility increased, but, at the same time, when asked to generate realistic scenarios and solutions they returned for a “default” of seeing homelessness as an individualistic problem. Based on this variation between capturing and missing social issues I recommend that when experiential opportunities allow for producing independent thinking, it must be a situated learning experience, where learning, in context, allows the learner to engage with others and develop collective understanding, where scaffolding, help and support via feedback, continuous and allows for continuous critical reflections. I argue that reflective practice should be a lifelong practice because it turns experience into learning.

**INTERESTING COMPARISONS**

“The sun moves everywhere following us. “The sun is actually not moving.”

**CRITICAL VIEW**

• Things in life can just happen to anyone, if they do not work while they are at the shelter they should be thrown away!

**REFERENCES**