

## RESEARCH OVERVIEW

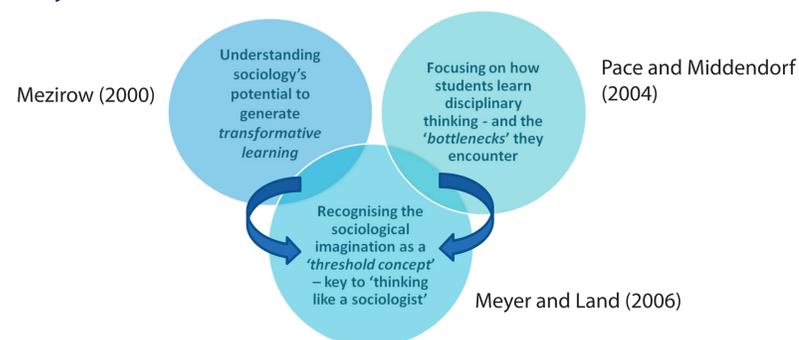
### Sociology as transformative

'The fascination of sociology lies in the fact that its perspective makes us see in a new light the very world in which we have lived our lives ..... This also constitutes a transformation of consciousness.'

Berger (1963:21)



### Study draws on three theoretical frameworks:



### My research questions:

#### Phase I

- How long does it take students to learn how to 'think like a sociologist'?
- How easy do students find it to grasp - and then apply - the sociological imagination?
- How many achieve this by the end of the course?

#### Phase II

- How many students demonstrate the ability to 'think like a sociologist' a whole year after taking a one semester Introductory Sociology course?

### The study:

#### Documenting the development of a sociological imagination

- Mixed methods, longitudinal study of student learning in a one-semester Introductory Sociology course
- Conducted over 3 years in 12 classes
- Two phase research design

Phase I: track student learning trajectories through the semester

Phase II: follow-up survey one year later

### Student participation and response rates

SEMESTER	Participating classes	Participants (Phase I)	Participants (Phase II)
Summer 2012	1	36	9
Winter 2013	2	65	21
Summer 2013	2	63	12
Winter 2014	2	64	13
Summer 2014	2	60	15
Winter 2015	2	47	18
Summer 2015	1	30	13
Don't remember			5
<b>TOTALS :</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>106</b>
Participation/ response rate		92%	52%

## METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES AND RESEARCH DESIGN

### Phase I: sample data collection schedule

Week 1	Survey: student profile, motivation for taking course
Weeks 2*,8, 10*	LD: Questions based on textbook reading for that week
Week 3	LD: 'Velcro' questions on course content Weeks 1-3
Week 4	Test 1 included questions on the Sociological Imagination
Weeks 5, 9, 11*,12*,13	LD: Questions based on class discussion of that week's topic
Week 7*	LD: Questions on applying sociology to everyday life
Weeks 1, 14	LD: Individual and Society mind-map + explanatory notes
Week 14	Final LD: 'Velcro' questions for course as a whole
Final exam	Final exam included questions on the Sociological Imagination and the 'American Dream'

### Classroom Assessment Techniques employed in Phase I (Angelo and Cross, 1993)

#### 'Velcro' questions - set of three:

- At this stage in the course/based on this week's class/this week's reading
  - a) what are the things you feel confident about (that are 'sticking' with you)?
  - b) what are you finding unclear or confusing/what do you not 'get'?
  - c) what have you found most interesting so far/what makes you want to find out more?

#### 'One-minute' paper:

- What was the most useful/meaningful/valuable thing you learned in to-day's class/? this course?

### Designing test questions to assess student understanding

"To be completely honest I don't understand the concept of the sociological imagination. I was glad it wasn't on the test. I could remember the definition of it from the textbook but I don't understand the concept itself."

(Student S12-24)

- this highlights an important difference between what students may 'learn' (memorise) and what they know and can apply
- this led me to include both *direct* and *indirect* questions on this concept in tests

### Phase II: follow-up online survey – sample questions

#### Likert scale items tapping course impact and concept recall (scored 1: strongly disagree - 5: strongly agree)

- I still remember the concept of the sociological imagination well enough to explain it to somebody.
- Taking this course made me realise that one semester is too short to really 'get' what sociology is all about.

#### Open-ended questions tapping ability to apply the sociological imagination

- In what ways (if at all) has taking this course made you think differently about how people act and the choices they make in their everyday lives?

### Observations:

- Employing both qualitative and quantitative data-collection proved invaluable in both phases
  - tracking student learning via weekly dossier entries revealed important differences in learning trajectories
  - inconsistencies between test answers in Weeks 4 and 14 highlighted the limitations of tests as adequate indicators of deep learning by exposing evidence of 'cram and dump' learning
  - the use of open-ended questions in the follow-up survey was important in generating richer qualitative data to complement Likert scale responses

## ETHICAL ISSUES AND DECISIONS

### The ethics of conducting research with our students

- Hutchings (2002) drew attention to the 'ethics of inquiry' within SoTL
  - blurring of instructor/researcher roles in classroom-based research
  - risk of exploiting student trust and dependency
- Main concern of Research Ethics Boards is 'undue influence' of researchers studying their own students - see TCPS2 (2018) Articles 3.1, 3.2
- TCPS2 therefore makes explicit the need for fully voluntary informed and ongoing consent from students
- But some REBs require use of language that may deter students from providing consent in low-risk scenarios (Grayson, 2004)

### Obtaining student consent to participate in this study:

#### Phase I

- Employed a two-stage consent process:
- Week 1 of the semester – study information distributed and initial consent to participate requested (Consent 1)
  - specified use of learning dossier written responses
- Week 13/14 – consent requested again (Consent 2)
  - three elements involved: students could accept/refuse each of these
    - a) repeated request to use learning dossier responses
    - b) requested ability to link these responses to test marks
    - c) requested permission to make contact 12 months later for online follow up survey (students provided email contact information)

#### Phase II

- Participation in online survey was specified as indicating consent

### Specific ethical issues:

#### Phase I

- Students' learning dossiers were assessed for course credit
  - i.e. completion was necessary but students could then choose whether or not to allow their use as research data

#### Phase II

- Follow-up online survey invited respondents to identify themselves
  - enabling me to link their survey responses to their Phase I data
  - enabling them to be entered into draw for one of ten \$10 coffee cards

### Observations:

- Developing a strong consent process was critical, given my dual role as instructor and researcher
  - care in wording the information sheet and follow-up emails was important in engaging participants
  - this resulted in high participation and response rates for both phases of the study

### References:

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