

Backwards by Design Assessment Project

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### **Backwards by Design Assessment Project**

Currently, KIN 321 Sociology of Sport is the only sociocultural class in the kinesiology program and perhaps, one of the only sociology courses that kinesiology students will ever take. It is quite common that a sport sociology course is the first (and unfortunately only) upper class course that forces the students to critically analyze the underpinnings and values of the sport institution in which many are working so hard to promote. Since the class is approached from a conflict theorist approach (i.e., what I like to call the nitpick theory) and often challenges long held beliefs, a key threshold concept in the course is to analyze sport and sport institutions from a critical perspective. I have found a cumulative assignment that requires observation a key component to help develop the learning of the critical analysis threshold concept. The observation and conceptual analysis of different level sporting events is meant to help kinesiology students grasp the institutional problems of sport. I have used this assignment for years in a semester system; however, the Backwards by Design (BBD) workshop inspired me to zero in and emphasize the development of this threshold concept by updating this observation assignment. Thus, the purpose of my BBD project was to review and revise this assignment to 1) highlight the conceptual underpinnings of the observations to enhance student learning and writing, 2) reintroduce a small group assignment requirement in the course, which is fitting in a sociology course, and 3) make the assignment more manageable to grade in the quarter system.

In the past, my course included essays exams, a current events article review, and this observation project. The observation project included attending and taking notes on four live sport events (youth, high school, one female and one male intercollegiate sport events) and writing an essay comparing and contrasting the events on sociology themes such as gender, values (win at all costs), ethnicity and media. This project was due at the end of the semester and

culminated in small group discussions to share experiences and identify patterns. Although students enjoyed this project, the submissions often lacked a thorough conceptual application and the class discussions tended to be surface level, probably because it was usually held during the final exam period and sometimes weeks after observations occurred.

After the BBD retreat, I took a critical eye to the entire course assessment structure and implemented a few major changes this past winter quarter. I deleted the current events article review when I realized it was busy work and focused on changes to the observation project in order to expand the scope of student learning objectives that it covered. The assignment is now an integrative observation assignment that: 1) includes both individual and team components, 2) introduces the technique of conceptual mapping, and 3) includes different modes of writing assignments in observation note and a small essay. See the attachment for a full description of the assignment. The students still attend the same amount of sport events, but the due dates for the observations are spread out through the quarter so the portions are due near the dates when the topics are discussed in class.

The first section of the assignment due is the youth sport portion, which is due at the conclusion of the youth topic lectures. Individuals are required to submit their observation report and to utilize a new skill of concept mapping to outline their observations. On the due date of the individual portion of the project, students are divided into small groups (i.e., teams) where they share the details of their personal observations and individual concept maps. The small group then synthesizes the individual observations into a larger concept map directed at youth sport. Perhaps one of the most effective changes to this assignment has been in the introduction of focus questions to guide the concept mapping for each section of observations. For the youth sport section, students answer the question, “Does adult organized youth sport lead to positive or

negative sport socialization?” There is a different focus question for each section and students must address the question for both the individual and team concept maps. The teams have one class period to create a draft of their team concept map and to discuss an accompanying five bullet point narrative to the map. The team portion of the assignment is then due two class periods later. Individual observations and maps are relatively easy and enjoyable to grade, allowing for a quick turnaround of feedback before the next section is due.

There are three sections of the assignment (both the intercollegiate events are combined in one concept map with a focus question surrounding gender equity) with both individual and team portions. Students compile all sections of the assignment towards the end of the quarter and then write a two-page synthesis reflection essay. Final projects are bound in a professional folder.

Overall, I was extremely satisfied with the changes to the integrative assignment for many reasons. The small group portion of the assignment went very well. Because the team task was directed by a focused task and highly manageable in one class period with minimal roll over into personal time, there was an absence of student conflict that sometimes occurs with group work. Second, the grading of the project was highly manageable, which allowed for more opportunity for quick feedback. Third, and most important, the quality of the assignments far exceeded years past. The essay portion in particular, vastly improved. It was apparent that students had become so acquainted with the conceptual framework through the use of the mapping assignments that they were able to delve deeper into the true meaning of the project in their reflections. The majority of reflections included evidence of critical thinking from a conflict theorist perspective, which contrasted years past when students tended to struggle with merely identification of sociological themes. Incidentally, although I only have anecdotal evidence, the

quality of the student work on the essay exams in this class far exceeded any of the previous eight years that I have taught the class. It could very well be that Western students test better than the other institutions in which I have taught; however, since the project section due dates corresponded to the topic discussions in class, it could be that the learning process was enhanced overall as a result of the revised project.

I was not the only one satisfied with this assignment. I assessed students' experiences with the project through five questions, which they answered anonymously upon completion of the assignment. When asked their preference for the integrative assignment compared to a traditional research paper the class averaged 4.3 on a scale from 1 (*definitely would prefer a research paper*) to 5 (*definitely preferred this integrative project*). Sixty-four percent of students answered they would definitely prefer the integrative project to a traditional research paper. Students were also asked if the observations and concept mapping helped formulate their thoughts when writing their reflection. Sixty-four percent of the students said that the observations and mapping helped their writing, 18% said it helped "very much so", while 15% said it did not help and only one student claimed it made the writing process worse. When asked general comments or suggestions, many students comments were positive: "I liked the concept map because it helps put the thoughts onto paper", "I thought this assignment was awesome", "The assignment was far more engaging, interesting, and ultimately more educational than a research paper", and "Overall, this assignment worked well for the goals of this course." In addition, several students were very supportive of the separation of due dates to "help break it up" and "not seem overwhelming". A few students also commented on the team aspect in that it "...helped students practice teamwork" and, "...generated more ideas and observations".

To my surprise, a few students also directly addressed their thoughts about the project in their reflection essays (see below), which was a treat to read. Overall, I think the revision of the course and this integrative project was highly successful for student learning and for my own self-preservation. Frankly, the resulting increased student excitement has reenergized *my* engagement in the assessment process for this course. I feel the best way to summarize how the Backwards by Design retreat helped me in this process was that it gave me inspiration and courage to challenge myself in a redesign. Until this assignment I had never required concept mapping in a class and had only been exposed to the pedagogical side of concept mapping a couple months prior to the course offering. The success of this assignment has increased my motivation and self-efficacy for other course redesigns.

### **Excerpts from Student Reflection Sections**

Observing three levels of team sports from a conflict theorist perspective allowed for a new vantage point to examine sports. It revealed that there is more to sports than simply a game being played. Whether it be increasing negative trends in youth sports, too much emphasis on a professional model in interscholastic sports or gender equity issues in intercollegiate sports, it is clear that sports include many sociological themes that paint an entirely different picture of sports than what is held by the majority of the public. –Student A

This project consisted of observing a youth sport event, high school sports event, and a male and female collegiate sport. After observations were made a concept map was constructed for each game that revolved around a specific and appropriate focus question. The maps aided in visualizing all the different “agents” and how they interacted and impacted one another. For example, lines were drawn and descriptors gave representation for how a coach might impact a player and how that player might in turn impact the coach in the contest of: socialization in youth sports, a professional model in high school athletics, or gender equality in collegiate sports. – Student B

Each of these observations failed to produce a clear and definite answer between one or the other. The simple reason for this was that each observation provided at least some evidence for both sides of the answer. And each answer fell into a gray area between the two sides which I had to navigate through. My decision ultimately had to swing to one side of the other based on the totality of the circumstances. ... All in all, I have noticed and learned much more for these events than through sport sociology than I ever would have noticed on my own.

When I would observe sport at one of these levels in the past, it was in a rather passive sort of way. I did not notice much outside of who was winning and who was losing. I see so much more now and it is interesting. I see more of the disparity between men's and women's sports; I see more of the negative qualities of professionalism seeping into interscholastic sports, and I see more of the insufferable, anxiety-producing parents in youth sport. – Student C

I am thankful for the pessimistic perspective this course has granted me. As I make choices as to what games get my attention, I plan on using the lessons learned throughout the quarter to guide me to make culturally responsible decisions. – Student D

Partaking in this class and project has definitely changed my outlook on sports and their place in our society; I used to think that sports built character in children and kept young adults on the straight and narrow; however, now I am not too sure. My eyes have been open to the negative aspects that sports can implicate whether it is negative socialization, contradiction of an educational mission, or gender equality. One thing I do know is that, as a society, it is our responsibility to make sports as positive of an experience as possible; sports have too big a place in our society to allow for these negative consequences. – Student E

**KIN 321 - Winter 2013****Observation Integrative Project (Total Points = 100 points)**

The purpose of this assignment is to provide you with the opportunity to integrate and apply what you have learned about the sociology of sport from a conflict theorist perspective using observations and team concept mapping. You will complete this three times over the course of the quarter and then submit the entire integrative observation project in a professional report on the date indicated on the course calendar. The professional report will include an additional 500-700 word reflection synthesis summarizing your learning of content and experience.

The assignment will consist of three parts:

- 1) Integrative Individual Assignment: observations and map (4 observations x 10 points; 3 maps x 5 points)
- 2) Integrative Team Assignment: map and narratives (3 maps x 10 points; 3 narratives x 3 points)
- 3) 500-700 word reflection synthesis (1 x 6 points)

**1) Individual (or Paired) Integrative Assignment (see calendar for 3 due dates)**

Each individual (or pairs) will observe the assigned sporting activity before the due date (note: there will be four of these due during the quarter: youth sport, one interscholastic sport, two intercollegiate sports [one female, one male]).

- a. Individuals (or pairs) will then write up their observations using *the appropriate template found on Blackboard*. The more detail the better.
- b. Then using the eye of a conflict theorist, each individual will create a **concept map illustrating your observations from the sporting event and your conceptualization of the situation (i.e., cause and effects) while answering the assigned focus question (see below)**. Note: You will have two observation summaries for each of the intercollegiate events but collapse into one concept map. You can either draw and label your map by hand or use mapping software (e.g. SmartArt in Microsoft Powerpoint; Inspiration™) to create it. You may organize your map so that the observations (this will vary according to your observations since you may or may not observe potential problems) are in the middle, the socializing agents/issues/causes are to the left of the middle of the page, and the potential solutions (based on the problems/observations) are on the right side of the page. If your observations are dichotomous, you can draw your agents in the middle of the page and different results/observations to the right and left depending on the type of agent. The connections between the issues should be clearly identified using “connector arrows indicating direction”, and the same should occur for the solution side of the page. (hint: be sure to include class terminology in your labels) to explain what you observed. **Examples will be discussed in class during the second week of classes.**
- c. Bring **2 copies of your map and observation write-ups to class**. If you do not bring your Individual Integrative Assignment to class on the assigned days, you will not be allowed to participate in the Integrative Team Assignment (NOTE: you will receive a 20% pt deduction from your grade if 2 copies are not brought to class.)



**FOCUS QUESTIONS:**

**Youth Sport:** Does adult organized youth sport lead to positive or negative socialization?

**Interscholastic Sport:** *Pick one* 1) Is varsity high school sport consistent with the educational mission of the school? Or 2) Is there too much emphasis on the professional model in varsity high school athletics?

**Intercollegiate Sport:** Is there gender equity in intercollegiate sport?

**2) Integrative Team Assignment (see calendar for 3 due dates)**

Students will then be assigned into groups during class and will use their Individual Integrative Assignments to bring their ideas about their observations together as a team to discuss and compress synthesize. Each member will have a chance to present and explain his or her ideas to the team. Then, as a team, identify an integrative conceptual map of observations and course readings: a) the main observation, b) the causes; b) potential solutions. In class you will need to complete the following (any in class assignment that is not completed will have to be completed during personal time with the group).

- a. Create a Team concept map illustrating your thoughts about the observations as a whole. There will be various options for this map depending on what everyone in your team has observed. After your team has finalized your map, each member may draw a final version outside of class to be submitted on the due dates listed on the calendar or a member(s) can volunteer to draw the final product on software and send to the team (only one map needs to be turned in if this is the case). Team maps will be scanned and posted on Blackboard.
- b. Also, the team should create a **five bullet point** narrative to accompany your map to explain relationships and connections. Basically, this will be a brief way to put the thinking behind your map into words. Again, each member may type this narrative on their own or you may have a team volunteer do so and send to the team. The narrative should be typed on the back of the map or attached with a staple.
- c. If you are not present during team days, you will not be able to participate in the team assignment and receive a zero for that portion of the project. If you have a University excuse that falls on one of the team days, see Dr. Keeler during office hours asap.

**3) Personal Reflection Synthesis**

After you have completed all of the individual and team assignments, collect all of your observation summaries, maps, and narratives and organize them **in a professional folder**. Review them collectively, review class notes and write a 500-700 word reflection synthesis to the entire process and conclusions (both individual and team). This reflection should integrate a general summary and compare and contrast to course readings. In other words, what did your project and your team conclusions reveal as a whole and is it consistent with what you have learned in class? Why or why not? This summary should include one line title of "Project Synthesis" at the top, be double spaced, 12pt font (Arial or Times New Roman) and placed at the front of your folder/packet. **DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME ON THIS SUMMARY.** Every reference cited throughout the project should be included in an APA format reference list at the end of the project summary.

**4) Organizing Your Project**

- A) The order of your report should be as follows (a secure binding is required – paper clips will not be accepted):
  1. project synthesis and reference list

2. youth observation/individual map/team map/team narrative
  3. interscholastic observation/individual map/team map/ team narrative
  4. female intercollegiate observation/male intercollegiate observation/individual map/team map/ team narrative
  5. grading sheet with your name on it (can be downloaded from Blackboard).
- B) Be sure your items are labeled or tabbed in some fashion

### 5) Project Tips

- Review the reading on concept mapping
  - Be sure to include detailed cross links and multiple levels during your mapping
  - Use of color and different shapes enhance concept mapping effectiveness – be sure to include a key/legend so they can be understood
  - Make sure your map is structured to answer the focus question for that observation
- Obtain and plan your observation dates ASAP, be prepared to submit your planned schedule of observations on the due date listed on the calendar. Share sport schedules with classmates.

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Out of</b>
Project Summary		<b>6</b>
Youth Map		<b>5</b>
Youth Observation		<b>10</b>
Youth Team Map & Narrative		<b>13</b>
Interscholastic Map (Individual)		<b>5</b>
Interscholastic Observation		<b>10</b>
Interscholastic Team Map & Narrative		<b>13</b>
Intercollegiate individual map		<b>5</b>
Men's intercollegiate observation		<b>10</b>
Women's intercollegiate observation		<b>10</b>
Intercollegiate team map/ team narrative		<b>13</b>
Reference Sheet		
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>