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# Preparing Emerging Adults for the 21st Century: Diapraxis as a Bridge to Dialogue in the First-Year Seminar

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# Preparing Emerging Adults for the 21st Century:

# Diapraxis as a Bridge to Dialogue in the First-Year Seminar

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**Approvals**

*In the judgment of the following signatories, this Dissertation meets the academic standards that have been established for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.*

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**Abstract**

What is success in college? And what are the implications of that success (or failure) in the life of students after college and for society more broadly? This ethnographic study explores first-year college programming and the potential benefits of diapraxis-inspired instructional methods as a bridge to authentic dialogue for 18- and 19-year-old (emerging adult) students and the foundation for more productive civic engagement in the post-college adult lives of students. Opportunities for dialogue are lacking in many college classrooms, especially during the first year, and, given the current lack of civil communication between adults on a national and global scale, building these skills in young adults is a critical need. The researcher was embedded in a first-year seminar as a participant-observer to collect qualitative data. She collected data on classroom culture and dynamics while also facilitating occasional classroom diapraxis-activities inspired by the work of Rasmussen (1988). Follow-up interviews were conducted with the study participants after the course concluded. Key findings include the following: Some of these 18- and 19-year-olds are lacking the active listening skills needed to participate in dialogic settings; the social-emotional needs of students can impede learning and participation in dialogue; first-year students need to master college-level reading and writing skills before engaging in a discussion of college-level course content. A major conclusion is that relationship-building (between faculty and students and among students) and dialogue-building instructional methods should be emphasized alongside the delivery of content in the design of first-year programs.

*Keywords:* first-year seminar, diapraxis, dialogue, emerging adulthood, active listening

**Acknowledgments**

My doctoral journey started long ago, 1989, to be exact. For almost two decades, it stalled, and there were points in my life when I doubted that I would reach the end. I am thankful to the many who have been there along the way to help nudge me forward. First and foremost, my husband, Silvestre Fontes, who met me during my first attempt at the PhD and who has over the years encouraged me to return to graduate school. Doctoral programs take years of work, so I thank him and our children, Katie and Antonio, for giving me the space and time I needed to complete it.

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Finally, before I entered the doctoral program at Lesley University, I re-entered the world of graduate school at Regis College, where I received my CAGS in 2012. There, I regained my confidence as a student and had my first experiences with university teaching and administrative work. My colleagues became friends, confidants, and mentors. They encouraged me to present papers at academic conferences and wrote letters of recommendation when I decided to, once again, pursue a PhD. Over the years, they have continued to meet with me to sip margaritas, share their perspectives on higher education, and listen to my theories and ideas. I will forever be grateful for how they always made me feel like an equal and never an imposter.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Colleges[1] are assigned the unofficial job of developing "successful" adults. This is not necessarily something taken on voluntarily or even acknowledged, but in recent years it is indeed one of their duties. But what do we mean by "successful"? At the institutional level, this is typically measured in terms of job placement and the average earnings of graduates.[2] It might also be measured by graduation rates, a measure that is a great concern for university administrators, as graduation rates have increased slightly in recent years but are not promising overall (Shapiro et al., 2018).[3] One piece always missing from these measures is long-term civic engagement, which, admittedly, is challenging to quantify. College students eventually become independent adults who contribute to the determination of what will and will not happen socially and politically at all levels of society (local, state, national, and global). Because they are entrusted with the education and, often, the care of so many young adults, colleges are responsible for helping to guide the next generations of citizens. These future generations will be responsible for managing the economy, sustaining the natural environment, creating structures to care for an aging and growing population, and solving a myriad of untold problems. "Success" in tackling all the knowns and unknowns requires levels of responsibility that most young people who enter college do not yet know how to navigate.

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[1] For the purposes of this research, the term "college" is used when referring to undergraduate American two- and four-year institutions of post-secondary education, as the focus is upon undergraduate students. The term "university," when used, refers more generally to post-secondary institutions serving undergraduate and/or graduate students and which often have multiple colleges and schools within their organizational structure.

[2] Title IV of the Higher Education Act requires institutions of higher education to demonstrate that degree programs provide for "gainful employment in a recognized occupation" (Federal Student Aid, n.d., para. 1) in order for their students to be eligible for federal financial aid.

[3] Graduation rates are determined by the percentage of students who graduate with a bachelor level degree within a period of six years. The most recent data, based on data provided to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, indicates an average graduation rate of 58% across all undergraduate sectors (two- and four-year colleges, public and private, nonprofit and for-profit; Shapiro et al. 2018).

2020 has provided us with nearly a year of pervasive unknowns. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced the entire world, including the custodians of higher education, to shift its thinking. Some students will likely not persist, and some colleges and universities may not either. The question is, will we use this moment as an opportunity to create something stronger going forward so that the next generation of leaders is better prepared for the *next* crisis, or post-COVID, will we attempt to return to business-as-usual?

**Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

My dissertation research focuses on the first year of college because it becomes a critical starting point for framing students' future responsibility. Specifically, I explore the role and the quality of dialogue in the first-year college experience as well as the teaching methods and classroom tools that foster pedagogy focused on encouraging dialogue. Practice in dialogue, I assert, helps college students not only learn in a more meaningful way but also develop dialogic habits that they might carry into their post-college adult lives and which may well encourage civil and productive discourse throughout their lives. The goal of dialogue-enhancing instruction and the learning that emerges from it is not overtly political, that is, the goal is not activism during or after college. Rather, the goal is growing a young citizenry capable of speaking with one another in a manner free of the current vitriol so pervasive today and toward the establishment of a society capable of solving future problems collectively. Four questions are explored in this dissertation:

- What can be extracted from theories of dialogue and applied in first-year college programming?
- How does an instructor create a dialogic experience within a college First-Year Seminar without necessarily plunging directly *into* dialogue?

- What are the cognitive/emotive traits of emerging adulthood, and how do these traits impact a student's ability to participate in dialogue in the college classroom?
- How might colleges foster their students' dialogic skills so that they may grow into citizens capable of participating fully and responsibly in a democratic society?

**Research Approach**

For this research study, I used an adapted form of classroom ethnography. Ethnography is, at its core, a way of putting oneself in the place of others in order to better understand those others (Jackson, 2013). This is accomplished by the researcher embedding herself into the activities of the group being studied and collecting data that illuminates their social and cultural experiences. Anthropologist Michael Jackson (2013) suggested that "ethnography forces the life of the mind from contemplation to experimentation" (p. 254), for it is sometimes not enough to evaluate a theory or idea with a one-time test or an impersonal data collection method. In many instances, one needs to spend extended time with the subjects of a study to gain a deeper understanding of what is happening.

With the approval of the institutional review board, I conducted an ethnographic study by embedding myself in a single section of a First-Year Seminar (FYS) at Ann University[4] in the Fall of 2019. I was an observer who also, on occasion, facilitated classroom activities in consultation with the course instructor. The student-subjects were first-year students in their first semester of college and were all between the ages of 18 and 19. The instructor-subject was a faculty member at the university with five years of experience teaching an FYS class. In addition to observational data collected through field notes as a participant-observer, I conducted interviews with research participants during the Spring 2020 and Fall 2020 semesters.

[4] Ann University is a pseudonym for a private, co-educational four-year university located in a city in the Northeastern region of the United States.

**Research Assumptions**

Based on my past experiences working with undergraduate students as a course instructor and on a pilot study I undertook in the Fall 2018 semester, I went into this research study with four primary assumptions. First, in my experience as a college-level instructor, I understood the challenges of teaching content in a humanities course to first-year college students. While my own experience was in teaching history to undergraduates and the course in this research study was in the field of literature, I anticipated challenges the instructor might confront regarding students not completing the assigned reading and/or lacking academic preparedness for writing college-level essays.

Second, based on my fieldwork in the 2018 pilot study, I anticipated that authentic dialogue, as defined later in this chapter, would likely be infrequent. Because of this experience, I decided to note when students were the most engaged and participated most fully in classroom discussions, regardless of whether authentic dialogue occurred. For this reason, I also adapted my own role in the research study from that of passive observer to participant observer and as an occasional classroom facilitator. This allowed me to test various icebreaker and other diapraxis-inspired teaching tools (also defined later in this chapter) and assess their impact on classroom discussions.

My third assumption was rooted in my review of literature on adult learning and development, which follows this chapter. Because of the ages of the students in the classroom, I knew that what I might observe would be shaped by varied levels of social-emotional and cognitive development on the part of the students as emerging adults. I assumed that the students, while all within a range of 18 to 19 years of age, would arrive at Ann University in the FYS class at different stages of development in Kegan's (1994) orders of consciousness

(discussed at length in Chapter 2). Some would still be in the second order, thus still firmly motivated by their own feelings and needs. Others might be in the third order and influenced by their social relationships and the ideological beliefs of others, and a few might be ready to cross the bridge into a fourth order, having self-authoring minds and an openness to new ideas, both of which are needed for the critical thinking required in authentic dialogue.

Finally, having read the academic literature and other non-scholarly sources on the rising rates of depression and other mental health issues among adolescents and young adults, I anticipated some of the students having some social-emotional challenges. These needs, I assumed, would create additional challenges for the course instructor, and this might impact the overall classroom environment. My own teaching experiences with undergraduate students also influenced my expectations. Having taught first-year students, I knew the challenges of playing the roles of teacher and counselor without the proper training in one or both and in a setting in which the students are new to the college experience.

**Rationale and Significance**

The rationale for this study stems from my previous experiences working with undergraduate students and my concerns about the state of higher education. Throughout my undergraduate teaching and into my doctoral studies, I often reflected on my own failed classroom moments and my desire to engage my students more fully and better prepare them for life after college. Three essential questions lie at the heart of this concern: *How does one inspire another to learn? What is the purpose of higher education in a community or society? How should institutions of higher education prepare young adults for their post-college adult lives and responsibilities?*

With these questions in the back of my mind, my doctoral research has focused on first-year college classrooms and the challenges faced by college students entering the world of higher education directly from high school, the faculty who teach and guide them in this journey, and the university administrators who design their programs. I began this study for the purpose of exploring these areas of inquiry and with the goal of providing guidance to my future self, should I be in a position to teach undergraduates, and others in the world of higher education wishing to improve upon, modify, or change the first-year college experience.

**Researcher Perspectives**

At the time of this study, I had not taught an undergraduate course for five years, as I had been teaching graduate-level courses. However, prior to entering the PhD program in Educational Studies, Individually Designed Specialization, I taught undergraduate- and graduate-level history courses for three years at two different four-year universities and often had first-year students in my classes. My interest in pursuing a PhD in education rather than in history stemmed from this experience and my desire to explore issues of undergraduate student engagement. Specifically, I wanted to research college programs of study and ways to rethink the college experience in a manner that more deeply engaged young college students and better prepared them for post-college life and adult responsibilities.

Despite being a few years removed from my undergraduate teaching, I regularly communicated with former colleagues still working directly with undergraduate students to informally discuss their experiences. I also observed four different sections of FYS and several sessions of a weekly advising class in a Fall 2018 pilot study at the same university. This latter experience allowed me to observe approximately 70 first-year students in a classroom setting and strategically plan for my dissertation research study the following academic year.

## Definitions and Terminology That Guide This Research

### *Socratic/Maieutic Methods*

Rooted in the method of inquiry used by Socrates in Plato's *Dialogues* (380 B.C.E./2000), and guided by the work of Chesters (2012), I define Socratic/maieutic methods (as opposed to *the* Socratic Method) as an inquiry-based method of teaching guided by questions that encourages dialogue and independent thinking.

### *Dialogue*

After a thorough review of definitions from Saunders (2011), Bohm (1996), Chesters (2012), Freire (1970/2000), Burbules and Rice (1991), Mezirow (2000), and Buber (1947/2002), I define dialogue as

> The two-way communication of two or more people willing to actively listen to one another in a respectful and equitable manner, in which participants consciously attempt to suspend assumptions and are open to the possibility of changing their own perspectives.

This definition emphasizes the role of self-reflection in dialogue with a long-term goal of *praxis*. This assumes that participants work toward transforming the world through reflective action that begins with the self and then extends to others.

### *Authentic Dialogue*

The term authentic dialogue refers to a dialogic setting in which the goals of dialogue, as defined above, are accomplished and in which the dialogue does not descend into what philosopher Martin Buber (1947/2002) referred to as "monologue disguised as dialogue" (p. 22) whereby the participants begin to speak over one another.

### *Praxis*

The term praxis has Greek origins and can be defined simply as "thoughtful, practical doing" (Dennison, 2013, para. 1) and is defined by Freire (1970/2000) simply as "reflection and action upon their world in order to transform it" (p. 51). However, for the purposes of this research, I will be using the definition provided by Mishler (1999):

> [Praxis is] the dialectic interplay between our dual positions as subjects, first as active agents making and transforming the world, which then becomes the "objective" conditions to which we must then respond, as we adapt, make, and transform both ourselves and these conditions. (p. 18)

Therefore, praxis is not only about personal growth and change but also the change this effectuates in the world and the interplay between the two.

### *Diapraxis*

This term was coined by Rasmussen (1988), about which she notes that "by diapraxis, I do not mean the actual application of dialogue but rather dialogue as action" (p. 3). Expanding upon her work and this statement, I define diapraxis as the intersection of the communicative and relational aspects of dialogue with the action of praxis. It uses an anthropological and social approach and has the goal of relationship-building and serves as a bridge to dialogue.

### *Emerging Adulthood*

Based on the work of Arnett (2000, 2004, 2015), who coined the term and pioneered the field of Emerging Adulthood, a rapidly growing area of study, emerging adulthood is the period of delayed adulthood marked by identity explorations, instability, self-focus, feelings of being in-between, and possibilities. This period is neither adolescence nor adulthood and can last into a person's mid- to late-twenties.

### *Holding Environment*

A key element in Kegan's (1994) theory of orders of consciousness, a holding environment is "an evolutionary bridge, a context for crossing over" (p. 43) from one order of consciousness to the next. Key in this process is the proper amount of challenge and support. The existence of too much challenge creates a toxic environment; too much support creates boredom, and too much of either can result in disengagement. Finding the perfect balance is essential in the educational context.

# Chapter Two: Review of Literature

To prepare for my dissertation, I have thoroughly and carefully examined the literature in three main areas of inquiry:

- theories of dialogue and teaching methods, Socratic methods specifically, that promote dialogic habits among college-aged students;
- classroom environments that encourage relationship-building between students as a bridge to dialogue; and
- the social-emotional and cognitive journey from adolescent life to adulthood and the period in between.

## Socratic Teaching Methods and Theories of Dialogue

A review of the literature in this area of inquiry was guided by the following question: *What can be extracted from theories of dialogue and applied in first-year college programming?* This question is both broad in its level of inquiry but also specific in scope, as I wanted to explore the philosophical roots of dialogue and the historical application of these ideas in teaching and learning in higher education.

### *Socratic Dialogue in the Classroom*

In Plato's *Meno* (380 B.C.E./2000), Socrates and the other characters ponder and attempt to answer, through dialogue, the essential question "What is virtue?" (para. 16). What is important in this dialogue is not the conclusion, whereby Socrates and Meno are unable to define virtue or its nature, but the manner in which Socrates leads Meno to discover that some questions require constant revisiting. Common across all of Plato's dialogues, the method of questioning used by Socrates to stimulate dialogue and bring to the surface buried knowledge has provided some educators with a tool for classroom teaching, particularly in higher education.

Socratic methods of instruction, sometimes referred to as *maieutic* methods, have long been used in university classrooms to encourage a deep level of inquiry and to emphasize the unfinished nature of knowledge. When a teacher asks a question in response to an answer provided by a student, or, more importantly, acknowledges that the teacher herself may not have a simple answer or solution, the classroom dialogue becomes enriched, and this allows the student, as Charles Wegener (1978) noted in *Liberal Education and the Modern University*, to "becom[e] aware of … his own abilities, his own capacities" (p. 160). Wegener (1978), founder of the New Collegiate Division, an interdisciplinary department for undergraduates at the University of Chicago, further noted that the desired end is reached when teacher and student can exchange roles and "the teacher is to disappear *as such*" (p. 160). Thus, Wegener asserted, student-led inquiry is the ultimate goal of a liberal education, and many colleges, such as St. John's College in Santa Fe, NM and Annapolis, MD and the University of Chicago, have for decades used seminars guided by questions as a tool for encouraging students to "take active responsibility for their education, formulating questions and developing their thoughts in dialogue with one another" (St. John's College, n.d., The Academic Programs section, para. 1).

Despite being a traditional staple of some disciplinary studies in higher education—particularly the fields of philosophy and law—St. John's and the University of Chicago are in the minority. Socratic teaching methods have fallen by the wayside in many higher education classrooms. In fact, there is often pressure placed on instructors by students to avoid Socratic methods because it makes students feel uncomfortable. In *Why Teach: In Defense of a Real Education*, Mark Edmundson (2013) noted that the use of the Socratic method in classrooms "seems too jagged for current sensibilities. Students frequently come to my office to tell me how intimidated they feel in class" (p. 16). Even in legal education, well-known for the relentless in-

class questioning of one or two students per class session, pedagogical shifts have contributed to a significant decline in the use of the Socratic method since the 1950s and 1960s (Kerr, 1999).

### *Socratic Methods and Techniques*

Since *Meno*, a variety of teaching methods influenced by the style of Socrates have evolved and developed. One notorious method, adopted by some law school professors and made famous by John Houseman's portrayal of Professor Kingsfield in *The Paper Chase* (Bridges, 1973), relied on questions which grilled students, often relentlessly, on the particulars of legal case studies. Opinions differ on whether art truly imitated reality in the film; however,[5] one thing is clear: the Socratic method exemplified by Professor Kingsfield is used infrequently in legal education today (Kerr, 1999). Kerr (1999) noted three criticisms of the Socratic method in law schools: (a) the psychologically abusive nature of the method; (b) the method's inability to teach a range of skills needed by lawyers; and (c) the political and ideological agendas advanced by the method. On this latter issue, Kerr (1999) noted that "the Socratic professor appears nearly omnipotent, able to invade any student's personal space at any time" (p. 121). These criticisms, often from professors and lawyers who experienced Kingsfield-like trauma as students, have resulted in the adoption of a "toned-down Socratic method" (Kerr, 1999, p. 131) that de-emphasizes the instructor's role or a shift to alternative methods of instruction in law schools.

Outside of law schools, various forms of the Socratic method have been developed, employed, re-invented, and re-branded by educators wishing to extract the inquiry-driven benefits of Socratic techniques into kinder, gentler, and more developmentally appropriate maieutic methods. One example is *Paideia Seminars* which characterize the foundation of the National Paideia Center's Paideia Program and are defined as "a collaborative intellectual

[5] The 1973 *Paper Chase* movie and subsequent television series (1978-1979) were based on the 1971 novel by John Jay Osbourne Jr. during his third year at Harvard Law School.

dialogue facilitated with open-ended questions about a text" (National Paideia Center, n.d., para. 1) and an established protocol adhered to by the participants. This protocol includes a stated purpose for the discussion, assigned roles (students take turns as facilitators), and time for written individual reflection afterward.

Another form of the Socratic method, Socratic circles (Copeland, 2005), uses a fishbowl method of two concentric circles of participants. Those within the inner circle engage in a question-guided discussion, while those in the outer circle take notes on what they hear and observe in response to predetermined prompts or criteria determined by either the instructor or the whole group. Once the discussion is finished, the outer circle participants provide feedback to the inner circle, and then the circles then switch roles. Like Paideia Seminars, Socratic circles follow a protocol and set of procedures established in advance of the discussion. The protocol could be created by the instructor or collectively. Paideia Seminars and Socratic circles, because of their collaborative structures, set expectations that minimize the potential for abuse of power by the instructor or a group of participants and the subsequent psychological trauma indicative of *Paper Chase*-style Socratic questioning.

### *Theories of Dialogue*

Dialogue lies at the heart of Socratic methods, and for this reason, all Socratic methods—seminars, circles, questioning—have an element of discomfort built into their structure. Susan Davey Chesters (2012) suggested that what distinguishes dialogue from conversation is, in fact, disequilibrium. She noted that discussions "when kept to mere conversation … aim for equilibrium," but in dialogue, we aim for "a renewed understanding that comes from exploring ideas in disequilibrium" (p. 13). Without disequilibrium, we cannot probe into lines of inquiry unfamiliar to us, and we cannot reconstruct our previous knowledge. Chesters (2012) also

stressed the collaborative nature of dialogue. In distinguishing dialogue from debate, she noted: "debate is oppositional. … dialogue, on the other hand, focuses on collaborative deliberation, with emphasis on reasoning and the logic of argument in order to gain an understanding of the matters under discussion" (Chesters, 2012, p. 15). This suggests that while dialogue is collaborative and non-oppositional, one should not interpret that to mean that dialogue aims to censor or appease all participants.

Harold Saunders (2011), a diplomat, international relations scholar, and founder of the Sustained Dialogue Institute, defined dialogue as "one person listening carefully and deeply enough to another to be changed by what he or she hears" (p. 283). In this definition, dialogue is not the act of talking but the act of listening, and the relationship is built from an openness to hearing what another has to say. Dialogue, in this sense, is a trust-building process. And while the multistep process of sustained dialogue is designed to resolve conflicts, this definition of dialogue and the principles of listening for the purposes of learning can be and are applied in many other settings, including educational ones (Diaz & Perrault, 2010).

Within the context of a classroom, American educator and philosopher Nel Noddings (2012) suggested that the establishment of trust is a prerequisite for dialogue, that teachers need to encourage students to think aloud. While this sounds simple enough on the surface, she noted that for some students *and* teachers, the shift in power required for this process is a frightening proposition. Open freethinking requires time and space and can be full of errors and mistakes. Sustaining dialogue among their students also requires teachers to relinquish some of their authority and control over the subject matter. However, Noddings (2012) noted, eventually, "when students realise [sic] that their thinking will be respected, they enter the spirit of dialogue" (p. 774). Furthermore, "in this process, students not only learn the subject matter, they also *get to*

*know one another* [emphasis added]" (Noddings, 2012, p. 774). Thus, both Noddings and Saunders (2011) support participation in dialogue as a tool for fostering relationships regardless of whether that dialogue occurs in the classroom or geo-political arena (which many would argue all classrooms are).

In defining dialogue, British physicist and philosopher David Bohm (1996) took the reader back to the Latin roots of the word "communicate" (which translates "to make something common") before diving into the intricacies of the term "dialogue," which he established as one specific form of communication. On dialogue specifically, he wrote,

> in a dialogue, each person does not attempt to *make common* certain ideas or items of information that are already known to him. Rather, it may be said that the two people are making something *in common*, i.e., creating something new together. (p. 3)

The relational aspect of dialogue is also highlighted by Austrian philosopher Martin Buber (1923/1970, 1947/2002). In *Between Man and Man*, Buber (1947/2002) identifies three forms of dialogue: true dialogue, technical dialogue, and monologue disguised as dialogue. Of these three, he views technical dialogue as an "inalienable sterling quality of 'modern existence'" (p. 22) used to convey basic information required for objective understanding. Monologue disguised as dialogue, as the name asserts, involves two or more people but as if speaking to oneself. Both these latter forms of dialogue center around an I/It relationship, with distance between participants. In Buber's (1947/2002) philosophy, the only relational form of dialogue, in the spirit of I/Thou, is true dialogue: "where each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them" (p. 22).

### *Postmodern Perspectives on Dialogue*

One of the greatest barriers to dialogue, by any definition, is difference, be it a difference of experience, worldview, or perspective. In fact, for many, personal communication across differences, in general, often feels impossible in the current sociopolitical environment because of this.[6] In the classroom, attempts at dialogue can easily devolve into debate or monologue disguised as dialogue. It can also turn into a search for a Platonic ideal of Truth, which suggests a preconceived notion of what it entails, which, in turn, dismisses alternative viewpoints. This latter challenge sits at the heart of the postmodern theories of both dialogue and Truth. Postmodernists reject absolutes and thus argue that one cannot define dialogue by the search for something as absolute as Truth. However, as Nicholas Burbules and Suzanne Rice (1991) have suggested, this does not preclude the utility and wisdom of a postmodern conception of dialogue.

Burbules and Rice (1991) outlined a postmodern approach to dialogue that accepts the value of dialogue and difference but rejects the goals of reaching absolute truth or forced consensus. Dialogue across differences, they asserted, requires a rethinking of dialogue as a way of "establishing intersubjectivity and consensus, and … creating a degree of understanding across (unresolved) differences" (Burbules & Rice, 1991, p. 409) or, in some cases, partial understanding. The goal need not be a complete understanding or consensus. In fact, Burbules and Rice cautioned against dialogue that attempts to silence participants or eliminate differences. Success is instead rooted in what they called "communicative virtues" such as

> tolerance, patience, respect for differences, a willingness to listen, the inclination to admit that one may be mistaken, the ability to reinterpret or translate one's concerns in a way

[6] This dissertation was written during a time of divisive politics sowed by hateful and insulting rhetoric and vitriolic social media—Twitter and Facebook in particular—during which many Americans have become suspicious of both long respected traditional sources of information and of one another.

> that makes them comprehensible to others, the self-imposition of restraint in order that others may "have a turn" to speak, and the disposition to express one's self honestly and sincerely (Burbules & Rice, 1991, p. 411).

It is important to note that the communicative virtues highlighted by Burbules and Rice are not only useful in classroom dialogue settings but also provide a framework for future interactions across differences in post-college work and life. Providing opportunities for dialogue within these parameters in the classroom can therefore foster the development of important skills and have a lifelong impact.

### *Freire, Praxis, and Virtue*

Paulo Freire (1970/2000) defined dialogue as "the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world" but continued with "dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming—between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them" (p. 88). Dialogue, in this sense, is about meaning-making, but in a manner that is inclusive of different voices. On teaching method and dialogue, Freire says, "dialogue is a way of knowing and should never be viewed as a mere tactic to involve students in a particular task" (Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 379). In this spirit, teaching is concerned more with providing opportunities for dialogue and community engagement and support for students than in measurable outcomes. To place too much emphasis on outcomes would be counter to Freire's (1998, 1970/2000) concept of humans as unfinished. "Education does not make us educable. It is our awareness of being unfinished that makes us educable" (Freire, 1998, p. 58).

Freire (1970/2000) defined *praxis* as the "reflection and action of men and women upon their world in order to transform it" (p. 79), suggesting an active, perhaps even activist, nature to

the concept. One cannot transform the world without some desire to disrupt the status quo. Freire's (1970/2000) most famous book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, suggests as much with the revolutionary language typical of his early work. However, he was quick to note that "mere activism" is not enough—reflection is essential for praxis to occur.

The term *praxis* has Greek origins and can be defined simply as "thoughtful, practical doing" (Dennison, 2013, para. 1). The terms bring together two additional Greek terms, *theoria* and *poiesis*, or the intersection of "doing" with the theoretical search for Truth (*aletheia*). These three terms—like many other philosophical ideas that permeate the world of the Ancient Greeks—overlap with other concepts, such as dialogue (*dialogos*) and virtue (*arete*). Thus in "doing" dialogue in an engaged and active manner that encourages reflection, one is more likely to engage in praxis and, consequently, become more virtuous.[7] Ultimately, however, this pursuit of virtue and truth is not only a personal quest but part of a greater good, as praxis has a dimension that extends beyond the self.

> Elliot Mishler (1999) defined praxis as
>
> the dialectic interplay between our dual positions as subjects, first as active agents making and transforming the world, which then becomes the 'objective' conditions to which we must then respond, as we adapt, make, and transform both ourselves and these conditions. (p. 18)

Therefore, praxis is not only about personal growth and change but also the change this effectuates in the world and the interplay between the two.

### *Working Definition of Dialogue*

[7] It is important to note here that the concept of *arete*, while translated as virtue, does not mean virtue in only a moralistic sense. I believe a better translation is Werner Jaeger's (1939/1945) translation of *arete* as a striving for personal "excellence" or the idea of living up to one's potential.

Given all the various definitions and descriptions of dialogue and in light of my desire for classroom dialogue that prioritizes the relational aspect, is respectful of the various experiences and perspectives of the participants, and is co-constructed with an eye toward praxis, my definition of dialogue is the following:

> Dialogue is the two-way communication of two or more people willing to actively listen to one another in a respectful and equitable manner, in which participants consciously attempt to suspend assumptions and are open to the possibility of changing their own perspectives.

This definition emphasizes the role of self-reflection in dialogue with a long-term goal of praxis. This assumes that participants work toward transforming the world through reflective action that begins with the self and then extends to others.

Expanding upon this, I will sometimes refer to *authentic dialogue* or dialogic settings in which the goals of dialogue, as defined above, are accomplished and in which the dialogue does not descend into what philosopher Martin Buber (1947/2002) refers to as "monologue disguised as dialogue" (p. 22) where those participating begin to speak over one another. I prefer authentic to *true* (Buber, 1947/2002) or *active* (Mezirow, 2000) because I believe the term more accurately captures a combination of the two. The term is also meant to distinguish authentic dialogue from the more formalized processes used in *sustained* (Saunders, 2011) or *deliberative* (McCoy & Scully, 2002) dialogue models, methods utilized primarily in political decision making or public policy.

**Teaching Methods and Classroom Environment**

Engaging in dialogue is fraught with challenges. A group of strangers—such as those brought together in a classroom—cannot be expected to simply jump into some idyllic Platonic

quest for knowledge and personal growth. This is especially difficult in a first-year college classroom where students are entering into an unfamiliar environment with varying degrees of experience in classroom discussion and dialogue. Additionally, the students' varying backgrounds may have provided them with varying and, for some, few opportunities for engaging in constructive dialogue in the past. Thus, the review of literature in this area of inquiry was guided by the following question: *How does an instructor create a dialogic experience within a first-year college classroom without plunging directly into dialogue?*

### *Stimulating Dialogic Habits in the Classroom*

In *Human Nature and Conduct*, educational philosopher John Dewey (1922/2002) suggested that habits are acquired through the environment in which they are developed. Furthermore, because of the social nature of human beings, habits are never developed in a "moral vacuum" (p. 16). Expanding upon this idea within the topic of education, Dewey (1922/2002) noted that, in this regard, "intellectual habits like other habits, demand an environment, but the environment is the study, library, laboratory, and academy. Like other habits they produce external results, possessions" (p. 69). Thus, the college classroom plays an important role in the development of lifelong intellectual habits well beyond what occurs in the classroom. An assignment or activity is important not only because it provides learning on a specific subject or topic but because of the experience of its participants and how that experience impacts future experiences and habits.

Practice in the process of dialogue as a skill is therefore essential in encouraging dialogic habits that extend beyond the classroom. One cannot gain the habit of dialogue without practice in an environment that encourages such a thing. On the issue of practice for the purposes of habit, Dewey (1922/2002) noted that to acquire greater skill, one needs practice *of* skill, rather

than practice *for* skill. “A flexible, sensitive habit grows more varied, more adaptable by practice and use” (Dewey, 1922/2002, p. 72). The development of dialogic skills requires more than just the instructor allowing for and encouraging discussion or conversation. In *Experience and Education*, Dewey (1938) indicated that “all genuine education comes about through experience[, but this] does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative” (p. 13). One can have an experience in which one develops habits that produce outcomes deemed undesirable on the part of the instructor. Dewey (1938) added in this regard that some experiences are “mis-educative” (p. 13), even dangerous, in that they can arrest the growth of future experience. It is the quality of the experience, reflection, and continuity of experiences (past and present) that stimulates learning and growth.

To understand this process of learning in the environment of present experiences—building upon learning from past experiences, which then impacts future experiences—one is tempted to think of learning in a linear or circular manner. However, Dewey (1922/2002) described it as a “spiral” we must “traverse” (p. 328). David Kolb (2015) expanded upon this model by noting that we return to prior experiences anew and that the spiral of learning “embeds us in a co-evolution of mutually transforming transactions between ourselves and the world around us” (p. 61). Differences in environment have a profound impact on present experiences, as does the process of reflecting on past experiences. Students are able to impact the learning of others by virtue of their participation in a learning environment. In the case of dialogue, students with dialogic habits and skills “teach” others by way of example. This, in turn, creates a larger group of individuals who can then enter the world to model similar skills.

Incorporating dialogue into lesson plans can also present a challenge. Some subject matter has traditionally used didactic methods, such as drills, lectures, and worksheets, as the

primary tools for instruction. This is true not only in primary and secondary teaching but also in higher education, where the college lecture with the "sage on the stage" has long served as *the* method of teaching. Also, while the transfer of information in this manner from teacher to students may prove useful in certain situations, many post-secondary instructors are shifting away from relying too heavily on these methods. To offset an environment that is viewed by some students as inactive and perhaps even boring, some professors use Socratic techniques to stimulate the process of inquiry. This is particularly true in college seminars that are designed to help students build knowledge through questions and discussions. However, as was discussed above, not all Socratic methods stimulate authentic dialogue, despite the dialogic roots of this method of inquiry. Specifically, the process of questioning does not, in and of itself, necessarily stimulate an environment in which all parties are respectful, actively listening, or open to the perspective of others.

### *Storytelling in Dialogue*

The primary role of the instructor in dialogic situations is to help students learn to participate within the established parameters of the structure on a level that encourages reflection and learning. The challenge, Courtney Cazden (1988) suggested, is to help students learn to speak within the structure rather than solely learn the structure. The idea of "fake it 'til you make it" may provide surface-level satisfaction for the students and instructor, but it will not result in real dialogue, only the appearance of it. So how might a teacher go about helping students to better understand the structure, and from that, actively speak within it? Stories of personal experience within a dialogue provide one possible tool for helping students ease into the adopted dialogue structure.

In *Storylines: Craftartists' Narratives of Identity*, psychologist Elliot Mishler (1999) suggested that narrative storytelling serves as a form of praxis. He contended that in storying our lives, we make choices in the narratives we present that have consequences for ourselves and those around us. Within his theory of narrative as praxis, Mishler noted that "personal narratives and life stories are: socially situated actions; identity performances; fusions of form and content" (p. 18). Stories are always subject to change based on the situation and potentially impact those within the social context in which they are presented. Additionally, understanding extends beyond the mere meaning of language and depends "on how the participants 'work together' with social and cultural frameworks of interpretation, resulting in an 'achievement' of our joint production and understanding of stories through our dialogue with each other" (Mishler, 1999, p. 18). Thus, by allowing classroom participants to share stories with one another, the instructor can create a way for students to speak within the dialogic structure and create a cultural and social framework within the classroom.

In *The Politics of Storytelling: Variations on a Theme by Hannah Arendt*, anthropologist Michael Jackson (2013) highlighted how individual stories allow us to find connecting threads of personal experience. Our ability to find commonality of experience, no matter how small, then opens us up to the perspectives of others and, in turn, to a better understanding of that perspective. However, the process by which this happens is often not quietly reflective and peaceful; rather, it is one that requires discomfort and moral and ethical destabilization. On the issue of discomfort, Jackson (2013) noted:

> Understanding others requires more than an intellectual movement from one's own position to theirs; it involves physical upheaval, psychological turmoil, and moral confusion. … In reconciling ourselves to this condition, storytelling is crucial, for

> storytelling provides us not with a means of changing that which we cannot change but with a way of reimagining it. (p. 250)

The upheaval, turmoil, and confusion identified by Jackson are similar to the reactions identified by Lee Anne Bell, Diane Goodman, and Matthew Ouellett (2016), all scholars on issues of equity, diversity, and social justice in educational settings, as the *contradiction* stage of educational environments that strive to promote equity and social justice. The feelings of unease we experience—while listening to a story that is upsetting or one that challenges our own worldview—are essential for growth in learning and understanding. Bell et al. noted that those moments of discomfort are the "learning edges" and suggested that instructors and facilitators encourage participants to notice and explore those moments. They also identified personal stories as one potential trigger[8] for these types of feelings. Thus, while a participant's story might trigger a negative reaction and a moment of discomfort, the story-as-trigger also provides a potential starting off point for personal reflection and future understanding.

***Diapraxis as Educational Method***

From the works reference above (Mishler, 1999; Jackson, 2013; Bell et al., 2016), and from my own teaching experience, I believe that the journey from sharing a story or experience to dialogue is not necessarily a linear one. It is entirely possible that points A (story) and B (dialogue) might never connect. One needs to do more than hear about another's experience to enter into an authentic dialogue. Dialogue requires a level of reflection and action on the part of participants that goes well beyond telling and hearing stories of experience. In more difficult

[8] The word trigger/triggered/triggers is used throughout this paper in different contexts. In some cases, I will refer to something (an activity, an action) "triggering" (verb) a response, be it emotional or otherwise. In other cases, I will refer to "trigger" (noun) or something that triggers a response, often an emotional response. And, in some contexts, I will refer to someone, most often a student, being "triggered" or the more colloquial term that has come to be used when a student reacts to something that is upsetting and triggers an emotional response.

cases, dialogue requires active preparation. The college classroom is no exception. One cannot say, "ready, set, dialogue!" For this reason, instructors need methods to help them create a classroom environment conducive to this goal.

One method that I believe has the potential, with modifications, to stimulate authentic dialogue in the classroom is rooted in the interfaith practice of *diapraxis*. Based on the work of Danish theologian Lissi Rasmussen (1988, 1993) in her efforts to improve Muslim/Christian relations in Africa and Europe, diapraxis theory assumes that dialogue is often difficult to begin, and, even when it is authentic, it may not result in any real action or change. Thus, diapraxis brings together the communicative and relational aspects of dialogue with the action of praxis. Diapraxis, Rasmussen (1988) noted, is not dialogue in action but "dialogue as action" (p. 3).

Dialogue is difficult, especially in situations where the participants are coming from completely different life experiences or worldviews. However, shared experiences, even when those sharing experiences do not resemble "typical" college classroom learning, help us connect to one another and break down some of the barriers that limit authentic dialogue. These experiences can be as innocuous as sharing a meal or participating in an art project, as simple as encouraging personal storytelling through prompts, or as formal and structured as traveling on shared field trips, inviting guest speakers to one's setting, or engaging in service-learning experiences together.

Rasmussen (1988) outlined several forms of diapraxis within the context of building interfaith relationships:

- Diapraxis as living and working together (p. 6)
- Diapraxis as co-witness (p. 7)
- Diapraxis as sharing common experiences and activities (p. 7)

- Diapraxis as common social and political involvement (p. 8)
- Diapraxis and dialogue as common worship, prayer, and meditation (p. 8)

While all five of these forms have the potential for secular adaptation in an educational setting, my research emphasizes the third within the context of the first-year college classroom.

### *Diapraxis as Sharing Common Experiences and Activities*

In her writing, Rasmussen's (1988) third form of diapraxis, "sharing common experiences and activities" (pp. 7–8), is actually discussed the least. Rasmussen (1988) stated simply that "diapraxis is to work together in common projects and activities, to exchange services and friendship" (p. 7). She spoke rather broadly on this subject in terms of Muslims living and working in European Christian communities. She also did not give examples of experiences or activities. One can only extrapolate and expand upon the foundation she provides. However, while Rasmussen (1988) provided few details or examples, in my opinion, this form of diapraxis has the most potential for classroom adaptation.

My interpretation of diapraxis as sharing common experiences and activities in the classroom is one in which the instructor provides opportunities for students to get to know one another through activities built into the curriculum. These activities can be short and frequent or larger in scale and infrequent. Also, they may or may not be directly connected to the overall course subject matter. Most importantly, it is a form of diapraxis that instructors can easily incorporate into preexisting lesson plans, as it requires some modifications but not a complete restructuring of existing curricula. Common experiences can be created through a variety of techniques and with different tools, such as icebreaker activities, field trips, and group projects.

I view the application of Rasmussen's conception of diapraxis as a bridge to authentic dialogue. Bridges are necessary in classrooms with one or some of the following factors:

- Students do not have the capacity to put aside assumptions and be open to the view of others. This is often developmental and is discussed below.
- Students have not honed their dialogic habits. This is often because of a lack of experience with engaging in dialogue.
- The subject matter is controversial or polarizing. Courses that touch upon social, political, or cultural topics are likely to have this problem.

In all three of these situations, a forced dive into dialogue will likely encounter problems and unexpected challenges, as the students may not yet possess the necessary skills for engagement in a dialogic process; and/or the classroom environment may not be structured in a manner that encourages authentic dialogue. On one end of the spectrum in these situations, the class could descend into a heated debate that goes beyond uncomfortable and into the territory of upsetting; on the other end, the class could be silent and non-participatory. A diapraxis bridge actually allows students to get to know one another before entering a dialogic space.

**The Journey to Adulthood**

For a majority of college students, especially those living on campus, college is their first time being on their own with adult freedoms and all the challenges that come with this experience. The journey from adolescent to adult and the period in between experienced by many young adults in college is the focus of this last area of inquiry in the review of literature and was guided by the question: *What are the cognitive/emotive traits of emerging adulthood and how do these traits impact a student's ability to participate in dialogue in the college classroom?*

**Special note.** This dissertation focused specifically on 18 and 19-year-old young adults who attend college in the United States. A majority of the students within this group, while

representative of a diverse cross-section of American society culturally, socially, and economically, have been raised in the United States and possess the means and/or access to resources to attend college soon after graduating from high school. I make special mention of this because I do not want to suggest in any way that the discussion below about adult learning and development is universal. Educational psychologist Barbara Rogoff (2003) noted that "human development is a cultural process. As a biological species, humans are defined in terms of our cultural participation" (p. 3). Culture plays a major role in defining the various stages of development from infancy to adulthood and shapes the environmental factors that foster that growth. Thus, an 18-year-old in another setting may be, for all intents and purposes, in a completely different developmental stage based on their experiences and the expectations of their cultural community.

### *College as Transition for Emerging Adults "Betwixt and Between"*

The movement into adulthood does not happen magically with an 18th birthday celebration. Since the mid-20th century, adulthood in the United States has been marked by age, be it 18 or 21, and transition through *rites of passage* (van Gennep, 1960/2010). In the past, these rites of passage into adult life often included new responsibilities via marriage, children, and the creation of a separate family home. But today, while a vast majority of young adults from marginalized populations—immigrant families, low-income families, families of color—manage a huge array of responsibilities in their families and communities, many young adults—college students from more privileged backgrounds in particular—are delaying these life choices, in turn, the rituals associated with them, and instead living in an extended period of *emerging adulthood* into their mid-to-late-twenties, a term coined by developmental psychologist Jeffrey Arnett (2000). Emerging adulthood describes the space in-between adolescence and adulthood, a period

of delayed adulthood marked by *identity explorations, instability, self-focus, feelings of being in-between,* and *possibilities* (Arnett, 2004, p. 8).

Arnett (2000, 2004) outlined several reasons for the extended length of emerging adulthood in today's young adults.[9] One reason is the ability to control childbearing through advances in birth control and, in turn, the ability to put off marriage until much later. On this issue, he noted marriage and family are viewed differently by young people today than by their mid-twentieth century counterparts, saying at one point, "it is not that they do not want marriage, a home, and (one or two) children—eventually. … It is just that, in their late teens and early twenties, they ponder these obligations and think, 'Yes, but *not yet*'" (Arnett, 2004, p. 6). Young adults are also putting off marriage and family for the pursuit of higher education, and, consequently, the responsibilities of full adulthood are delayed.

Other factors, such as structural influences and changing social norms, while not specifically addressed by Arnett, also play a role in the widespread nature of emerging adulthood and have been explored by other scholars within this growing field of study. Identity development is one such factor. Norona et al. (2015) suggested the ever-expanding range of possibilities that exist for young men and women in determining whom they would like to become and what the future may hold for them requires exploration, consideration, and experimentation. Gender roles, specifically, have shifted in terms of societal expectations and personal goals. Where once young men and women were expected to fulfill specific roles and were limited in terms of what is possible, options have opened up all around, including with how one sees their own gender identity. College is traditionally a time for this type of exploration, when young people are more apt to, as Arnett (2000) noted, try identities on for size, but are

[9] The field of Emerging Adulthood Theory, while now popular on an international level, is discussed in this dissertation in reference to colleges students, ages 18-25, in the United States.

today intensified with the increasing access to information (and disinformation) through various media and social media outlets that expand the range of knowable possibilities. This can then, in turn, further extend this period of emerging adulthood.

Economics and social class, the latter a social byproduct of the former, are also important factors in emerging adulthood. Given that adulthood in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s was, for lack of a better term, *triggered* by the economic need to support a family after marriage, those with the privilege of going to college and being supported were, and remain today, in a privileged social class. Dietrich and Salmela-Aro (2015) described emerging adults as young adults who *postpone* the transition to adult roles, thus suggesting a choice to "explore their life options" (p. 334) instead of immediately shifting to adulthood. However, not all young adults have the ability to make this "choice," and not all college students are provided with financial support throughout their college experience and, by extension, may not have the freedom for full emerging adulthood exploration. Additionally, employment rates for 25-year-olds, college graduates included, have not returned to pre-2010 rates.[10] Thus, career opportunities post-college that allows young people to support themselves are decreasing, and many young adults who attended college, with and without degrees, have been forced to either piece together part-time jobs and/or live with their families into their late 20s and early 30s (Vespa, 2017).[11] The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic fallout (still ongoing) will no doubt exacerbate these

[10] According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2021), since the recession of 2007-2009, the employment rate for 25- to 34-year-olds overall was lower in 2010 (73 percent), immediately after the recession, than in 2000 (82 percent), prior to the recession. And while the rates have increased since 2010, they have not returned to 2000 rates of employment (across all levels of educational attainment).

[11] According to the US Census Bureau, in 2015 approximately one third of all adults in the US ages 18-34 lived with their parents.

situations. How this will impact emerging adulthood, both in the short and long term, remains to be seen but is already a variable of keen interest to scholars in this area of study.[12]

***Rites of Passage for Emerging Adults***

In his 1909 book *Rites du Passage*, Swiss anthropologist Arnold van Gennep (1960/2010) wrote about rites of passage as the various rituals and ceremonies that mark the movement of individuals through phases of life or territorial movement from one place to another. Examples highlighted by van Gennep include puberty rites, marriage celebrations, and welcoming ceremonies for new members of a community. On the latter, he noted: "Whoever passes from one to the other [territory] finds himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds" (van Gennep, 1960/2010, p. 18). This idea of wavering, of not being completely in the new territory or out of the old, marks the period of *transition* outlined in van Gennep's tripartite structure of rites of passage - *separation*, *transition*, and *incorporation*. Transition defines the period and feeling of uncertainty, of the time between separation from one's previous location but prior to the full incorporation of the new territory. Anthropologist Victor Turner (1995) describes this period of being "betwixt and between" (p. 95) as a liminal state.

While the physical relocation from a childhood home to a college campus is a rite of passage in and of itself, it is not likely viewed as a student's long-term new home. In many ways, the entirety of the experience itself is designed to be temporary. This is not to say that rites of passage that welcome and support students in their new, as the phrase goes, "home away from home" are unimportant, but it is important to recognize the overall transitory nature of the

[12] The Society for Research in Child Development recently issued a Call for Papers on "The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Lives of Emerging Adults." https://www.srcd.org/news/call-papers-emerging-adulthood-special-issue-impact-covid-19-pandemic

college campus as a new territory. Another more important way in which the college experience serves as a rite of passage is as an entire period of transition between emerging adulthood and adulthood—as a place for growth and development, but also identity, exploration, and possibilities, as highlighted by Arnett's (2004) theory of emerging adulthood. The college experience is itself "betwixt and between"—a liminal state consisting of an extended period of transition with limited incorporation.

In an analysis of the stages of student departure, Vincent Tinto (1988) found that the first six months of college are vitally important in determining long-term student persistence and the completion of a bachelor's degree. He notes that separation, in van Gennep's (1960/2010) tripartite system, is especially important during this early period of college enrollment, and while the process of this separation is difficult and challenging, it is necessary for movement into the next stage of transition. This period, Tinto noted, is the most difficult and testing for first-year students. While many students manage without difficulty, others never fully integrate into their college community either socially or academically. They are unable to adapt to the overall culture of college life.

The challenges of separation are amplified for 21st-century students with the increasing use of social media tools and rising rates of depression and anxiety in many countries, including the US. The most current research suggests that Generation Z adolescents and young adults (born after 1992) are struggling with many issues, including loneliness (Cigna, 2018), depression, and suicide (Twenge et al., 2018). In a 2017 *New York Times* article, Frank Bruni discussed the "scourge" of loneliness on college campuses across the country, noting that "in a sea of people, they find themselves adrift" (para. 3). Bruni's use of the world "adrift" is interesting light of the highly successful book *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (Arum &

Roksa, 2011) in which the authors argued that a lack of rigor lies at the heart of all the academic woes on today's college campuses. Their book supported what faculty and administrators around the country felt at the time—less was expected of college students in response to demands by students and helicopter parents. Yet if examined with the context of growing amount of research highlighting the increasing rates of mental health issues among college-aged students, perhaps students are adrift for a variety of reasons, some of which are not fully recognized or addressed.

### *The Importance of Support and Challenge: Robert Kegan's Orders of Consciousness*

Support in the process of separation and transition must be first and foremost for first-year college students. However, the proper amount of challenge for the purposes of cognitive and academic growth is equally important. In his book *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*, developmental psychologist Robert Kegan (1994) suggested that it is important to understand both what motivates individuals at various points in this evolution and how to better foster growth from one phase to the next. His theory outlines five orders of consciousness that describe on a cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal level how individuals see and feel about themselves and the world around them.

Each of these stages is marked by the movement of lines of development from subject to object (See Table 1).[13] For example, as we enter the 3rd order, our intrapersonal enduring dispositions shift from subject to object, and our interpersonal point of view and cognitive understanding of the concrete likewise shifts. There is a shift of these cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal concepts from ideas we have *within* the self (I am) to that which we have *outside* the self (I have). The movement of these three lines from subject to object allows us to

[13] Kegan's 5th order of consciousness is not discussed in this dissertation for the simple reason that very few people reach this stage and while the orders are not age dependent, most who do develop 5th order consciousness are typically well beyond the age of a traditional college student. The 1st order is also not discussed, as almost all people move into the 2nd order of consciousness sometime in early childhood.

recognize the impact of our actions on others and recognize different points of view. For this reason, adolescents and adults who are still in the 2nd order of the "instrumental mind" are unable, on a cognitive level, to always be considerate of other's feelings.

**Table 1**

*Kegan's Orders of Consciousness*

| Order | Subject (I am) | Object (I have) |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | Instrumental Mind | |
| | Concrete: *Actuality, Data, Cause-and-Effect* | Perceptions |
| | Point-of-View: *Role-Concept, Simple Reciprocity* | Social Perceptions |
| | Enduring Dispositions: *Needs, Preferences, Self-Concept* | Impulses |
| 3 | Socialized Mind | |
| | Abstractions: *Ideality, Inference, Generalization, Hypothesis, Proposition, Ideals, Values* | Concrete |
| | Mutuality/Interpersonalism: *Role Consciousness, Mutual Reciprocity* | Point-of-View |
| | Inner States: *Subjectivity, Self-Consciousness* | Enduring Dispositions, Needs, & Preferences |
| 4 | Self-Authoring Mind | |
| | Abstract Systems: *Ideology, Formulation, Authorization, Relation Between Abstractions* | Abstractions |
| | Institution: *Relationship-Regulating Forms, Multiple-Role Consciousness* | Mutuality & Interpersonalism |
| | Self-Authorship: *Self-Regulation, Self-Formation, Identity, Autonomy, Individualism* | Inner States, *Subjectivity, Self-Consciousness* |

*Note.* In each order, the cognitive level is shaded blue, the interpersonal level is shaded yellow, and the intrapersonal level is shaded green. Adapted from *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (pp. 314-315), by R. Kegan, 1994, Harvard University Press. Copyright 1994 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

In the 3rd order, we enter a consciousness of the "socialized mind." During this developmental stage, we adopt the values and norms of society and became a part of the communities in which we live (Kegan, 1994). It is also during this stage that we begin to care deeply for not only what others feel but what they feel for us. During the 3rd order, our own beliefs are directly impacted by how others see us, and peer relationships and interactions are prioritized. The people and ideas with whom and which we are in the closest contact provide us with our view of the world and ourselves.

Individuals in the 4th order, or the self-authored mind, reflect on not only their relationships with others but also the world in which they live. Someone in the 4th order shifts the values learned and acquired in the 3rd order from the subject of knowing to the object of being (Kegan, 1994). It is during this stage that we begin to question some of the values and beliefs that were given to us and instead explore alternative perspectives. Additionally, someone in the 4th order can stand outside the relationships they have and make judgments without feeling as if they are abandoning those relationships. During this period, values are based not upon dogma but upon internal reflection.

What is important to note about Kegan's (1994) theory is that the various orders are not age-dependent—one does not automatically evolve through all five orders in a lifetime, nor do they shift at a specific age. While some generalizations can be made about the traditional ages at which some of us may shift from one order to another, it is not a guarantee. For example, almost all of us will move from the 1st to 2nd order (barring some type of neurological damage) during early childhood, but not all of us will move into the 3rd, 4th, or 5th orders. Therefore, it is entirely possible (and likely) that on an individual level, we know adults—young and old—living and functioning in the 2nd order who will never move into the 3rd order. These are the individuals we

might characterize as exhibiting "narcissistic" behavior, and we certainly all know 3rd order adults who cling to dogma and ideology given to them by others and never transition to a 4th order self-authoring mind.

The process of evolution requires what Kegan (1994) calls a holding environment or "an evolutionary bridge, a context for crossing over" (p. 43). Key in this process is the proper amount of challenge and support. The existence of too much challenge creates a toxic environment; too much support creates boredom, and too much of either can result in disengagement. Finding the perfect balance is essential, but this requires those providing the challenges or support to foster a "welcoming acknowledgment to exactly who the person is right now" (Kegan, 1994, p. 43).

The college or university is, in and of itself, a holding environment for adults of all ages. Through the process of interacting with other students and faculty, reading unfamiliar texts, and reflecting on ideas in assignments, students are challenged to think differently, if only for the short duration of a course or program of study. For emerging adults in particular, college is the quintessential place for growth and evolution, but this assumes the existence of the proper balance of support and challenge. Fostering growth in college students, many of whom are emerging adults, requires programming that provides the right balance of challenge and support for students on the spectrum of Kegan's (1994) orders of consciousness. Some students will enter college already in the 3rd order ready for the challenges of thinking that lead them to develop a 4th order self-authored mind. However, others will likely arrive still functioning in the 2nd order of consciousness, unable to think of the effects of their actions on others. A small percentage may have already evolved into the 4th order and are already engaged in the internal dialogue that further develops their independent worldview (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

# Chapter Three: Research Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore the role and quality of dialogue in the first-year college experience by looking deeply at the workings of one first-year college class. As a participant-observer in that class, I looked at teaching methods and classroom tools that foster dialogue. I used an ethnographic approach, aiming to understand the culture of the class and how that culture encouraged or inhibited dialogue among the students. I was guided by the following research question: *How does an instructor create a dialogic experience within a college First-Year Seminar?*

## Research Methodology

The research methodology for this study is an adapted form of classroom ethnography. After decades of study in the fields of anthropology, heritage studies, and educational studies, my research tendencies and preferences have always gravitated toward ethnography and the knowledge garnered from an immersive participant observation experience. This is not to say that I have not conducted other types of qualitative research or used quantitative methodologies. Professionally, I collected survey data, conducted case studies for the Chicago Public Schools, collected demographic data for other researchers, and analyzed quantitative data from school districts for the New Jersey Department of Education. However, my preferences always bring me back to ethnography.

Ethnography is, at its core, a way of putting oneself in the place of others to better understand them (Jackson, 2013). The researcher accomplishes this by embedding herself into the group's activities being studied and collecting data on their social and cultural experiences. Jackson (2013) suggested that "ethnography forces the life of the mind from contemplation to experimentation" (p. 254). It is often not enough to test a theory or idea with a one-time test or

data collection tool. In many instances, one needs to spend time with the study subjects to gain a deeper understanding of what is happening, what is going on in any given cultural setting.

Classroom ethnography differs from traditional ethnography in the length of time and scope, as most classroom ethnographers cannot spend entire days with their research subjects, especially in the context of higher education. In a traditional ethnographic setting, the researcher lives and works among those studied for an extended period (one or two years) and often at different points throughout each day and night. A classroom ethnographer, embedded in a single course or a series of courses, will likely have limited access to the subjects outside of the classroom environment and only for a semester or two. However, the goal for any ethnographer is the same: to observe and note cultural elements of the group and environment being studied. Wolcott (1978/1997) suggested that what separates ethnography from other qualitative methodologies is *culture*. Rooted in the methodology developed and used by anthropologists since the early 20th century and historians since the time of Herodotus in the 5th century B.C.E.,[14] ethnographic methods and the study of culture have been inextricably linked.

Wolcott (1978/1997) stated that "ethnography *is not a synonym for qualitative/descriptive* research but is *one particular form of it*" (p. 328). While traditionally situated in anthropology, ethnographic methodology and the accompanying methods have found their way into other fields. Sociologists, political scientists, psychologists—to name a few scholarly professions—have all adapted forms of ethnography, and thus one must ask if the focus on culture remains as *the* defining factor. Pole and Morrison (2003) used the term "social behavior" rather than culture to discuss ethnography in educational settings. Erickson (2010) likewise did not explicitly

[14] Herodotus, recognized by many scholars as the "father of history," traveled extensively to collect first-hand accounts for "The Histories," a recounting of the Greco-Persian Wars.

identify culture as a distinguishing factor but instead focused on "holism" (p. 322) within the context of classroom ethnography.

However, one might argue that below the surface of the descriptions provided by Pole and Morrison (2003) and Erickson (2010), regarding what the ethnographer is interested in studying, culture is what they are describing. For example, Pole and Morrison (2003) stated that ethnography generally achieves "a comprehensive and contextualized description of the social action within the location, event or setting" (p. 4), which is reminiscent of various anthropologists' definitions for culture. Marvin Harris (1998) said of culture, "my own view is that a culture is the socially learned ways of living found in human societies and that it embraces all aspects of social life, including both thought and behavior" (p. 2), thus connecting the social action with thoughts and behaviors. Along similar lines, Clifford Geertz (1973) defined culture as "a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (p. 89). Social action and culture are connected in these and other anthropological definitions.

One point of distinction between Pole and Morrison's (2003) view of educational ethnography and traditional views of ethnography in anthropology is the importance of a *thick description*. Since the mid to late 20th century, anthropologists have come to value the thick description, or a detailed and contextual description of activities observed and investigated, in ethnography. Geertz (1973) suggested that what is essential in describing cultural behavior as an outsider is not what the behavior or phenomenon means to the ethnographer but what it means to those involved in the behavior. A thick description extracts the nuanced meanings of behaviors within a culture and describes them in a discernible way to an outsider. A thick description,

Geertz (1973) famously noted (by way of referencing Gilbert Ryle, 1968/2009[15]), is understanding the difference between a wink and an involuntary eye twitch, describing the contextual meaning in a particular wink, and explaining why the action is one and not the other.

The job of the ethnographer, then, is to answer the question—*So, what is going on here?*—and to describe contextual data within an account (most often a combination of narrative and exposition) of her findings.

**Research Study Design and Rationale**

For this research study, I was embedded in a First-Year Seminar (FYS) course at Ann University in the Fall semester of 2019. I selected this specific classroom because of a prior relationship I established with the instructor during the previous academic year when I conducted a pilot study of several different FYS classes. The Fall 2018 pilot study involved semi-regular observations of two different FYS sections and less frequent visits to two other sections, including two classes taught by the instructor I decided to work with for my dissertation research. Because of this pilot study experience, I learned that deeply embedding myself in one section was preferable to sitting in on several for shorter periods. Concentrated focus on one FYS section would provide me with time to get to know one group of students and, in turn, provide more data and allow for a thicker description of the classroom environment. The pilot study also allowed me to reflect on the process of taking ethnographic fieldnotes, providing me with a baseline to fine-tune my data collection tools and better organize my observations for this study.

I conducted my dissertation study in two phases. Phase I involved collecting observational data and writing reflective fieldnotes during class meetings in the Fall 2019 semester. During these classes, I occasionally facilitated diapraxis-inspired (described in

[15] While Ryle was not the first to use the term *thick description*, Geertz specifically made reference to his use of the term in defining and describing the concept.

literature review chapter) icebreaker activities and on one occasion organized a field trip to a local museum. I engaged in these activities in consultation with the course instructor and, when possible, designed them to complement the course content. During Phase II (Spring 2020 semester and Fall 2020 semester), I engaged in lengthy semi-structured interviews with two students and the instructor. Had the pandemic not limited my access to the students, I would have interviewed more than the two students, but I was lucky that those two interviews were rich.

**Research Setting and Sample**

Students in the Fall 2019 FYS class were self-enrolled as part of the summer orientation and registration process. All first-year students at Ann University are required to enroll in an FYS course and select from a menu of different courses that cover various topics. The instructors design all FYS courses on topics about which they have expertise. Twenty-two first-year students, all 18 or 19 years of age, were initially enrolled in the class. Seventeen students remained after the ADD/DROP period (the first two weeks of the semester), and all were full-time students. Of these students, fourteen identified as female, two as male, and one as nonbinary.[16] All but three students lived on-campus. Five of the students had jobs outside of school, four working part-time and one full-time. Only thirteen students were still enrolled in the class at the end of the semester, as after the midterm exam period, three students withdrew from the course, and one student stopped attending classes.

Before teaching the Fall 2019 FYS section, the instructor had been a faculty member at Ann University for seven years and had taught in the FYS program for five years. The course theme that she focused on was the cultural representation of gender and violence in Spanish art

[16] Subjects in this study provided me with some general personal information, including gender identity and preferred pronouns. These self-identified characteristics are used in this paper when referencing the words and actions of the subjects.

and literature from the 17th to the 21st century. This topic was well outside my area of expertise, and for this reason, I read all the materials assigned by the instructor along with the students. The instructor also provided me with access to the class Blackboard site.

**Data Collection Methods and Positionality**

While some ethnographic studies lend themselves to the fully immersive nature of active participation, the researcher often enters a research setting as an outsider and in the role of what Wolcott (1978/1997) called *privileged active observer* (p. 336). The instructor/researcher coming into a classroom that is not her own but who occasionally facilitates instruction and interacts with students over an extended period while also collecting data falls into this category. She enters the classroom with less of an emic and more of an etic perspective but has familiarity with classrooms generally, if not the classroom she is studying, specifically. In such circumstances, the researcher is familiar with the language of the environment, the structure of the setting, and the functional nature of classrooms in a school, college, or university setting. Arguments regarding the value of one level of participation over another can be made, but ultimately it is a circumstance that dictates the ethnographer's role. An ethnographic account of one's own classroom automatically makes one an active observer. Research conducted within a classroom that is not one's own automatically shifts one's participation into that of a privileged active observer or a somewhat more passive observer.

In this research study, I assumed the role of a privileged active observer. While I quietly took notes and observed the activities of the students and instructor most of the time, as said, I sometimes facilitated instruction by providing occasional ice breakers and, at one point, took the entire class on a field trip. These interactions automatically removed me from the category of passive observer and, by nature of my frequent interactions with students, to an active level of

participant-observer. I also had many colleague-to-colleague conversations with the course instructor. For that reason, the level of my participation was both active and privileged.

## Data Collection Methods and Tools

Some of the tools most often employed by ethnographers include the use of data conducted through observations, surveys, tests, and interviews. While some may associate ethnography with qualitative methods, quantitative methods may also be used. In fact, Pole and Morrison (2003) advocated for removing the stigma around the use of quantitative methods in ethnography, especially in educational settings, so long as those methods meet the goals of ethnography. The number of methods used by an ethnographer to collect data is another decision made by the researcher. One could design an ethnographic study based solely on interviews and the collection of observational data. Historically, most traditional ethnographies involved the use of these two methods over a period of a couple of years. One could also design an ethnography that includes a survey or series of tests and the collection of observational data over the course of a semester. It is easier, in some ways, to define ethnographic methods in terms of what ethnography is not: "ethnographers who do just surveys or administer psychological tests are not doing ethnography" (Agar, 2008, p. 62). Implicit in Agar's statement is the suggestion that ethnography requires the researcher to use a series of data collection tools and to aim to dive deep below the surface of the limited data available from these tools.

### *Phase I: Observational Data and Diapraxis Facilitation*

**Observational Data Field Notes.** In reviewing the literature and through my own experiences, one method stands out as a staple in ethnography—the collection of observational data. I have a difficult time imagining how a researcher would go about doing ethnographic

research without recording notes on what is seen, heard, and reflected upon over the course of a study. In *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes,* Emerson et al. (2011) noted:

> the ethnographer participates in the daily routines of this [social] setting, develops ongoing relationships with the people in it, and observes all the while what is going on … second, the ethnographer writes down in regular, systematic ways what she observes and learns while participating in the daily rounds of the lives of others. In so doing, the researcher creates an accumulating written record of these observations and experiences. (p. 28)

Today's fieldnotes may be digital in format, but the function remains the same. One cannot attempt to interpret or analyze the culture of a village, organization, classroom, etc., without taking notes on what the researcher observes, then reviewing, revisiting, and analyzing those notes.

In this study, I kept fieldnotes of all my observations. The FYS section met twice weekly in the afternoons, and I attended all except two classes over the course of the 15-week semester. I wrote fieldnotes on a laptop in the classroom. During each class, I sat in a corner and took notes on the sequence of activities, questions, and prompts provided by the course instructor, students, or myself (as a facilitator), notable student responses, and other observational details, using the format in Appendix A. My primary focus was student engagement, personal story-sharing, and any observable instances of classroom dialogue. Because of my experiences in the 2018 pilot study, I anticipated that clear examples of the last item would likely be infrequent, and so I noted when students seemed most engaged and participated most fully in classroom discussions. Because of my review of the literature on emerging adulthood and adult learning and development, I also knew that speaking from personal experience might be the discussion norm

for a group of 18- and 19-year-old students, as emerging adults are sometimes still in the 2nd order of consciousness and more self-focused. This was especially important to note after the icebreaker activities and my adaptation of diapraxis in the classroom. During these observational periods, I took note of when the students seemed anxious, upset, or overcome with emotion, as it became clear within the first two weeks of class that emotional triggers would ultimately become a theme in this research study (this will be discussed at length in the next chapter).

**Diapraxis Facilitation.** In addition to observations, the course instructor allowed me to facilitate teaching with icebreaker activities and an off-campus field trip. These activities were designed within a framework of *diapraxis as sharing common experiences and activities* discussed in Chapter 1. The icebreakers took place on seven occasions throughout the semester and included the following:

- *Think/Pair/Share.* (I offered this activity twice.) Students were provided with a prompt or question and given 90 seconds to write down a response. Participants then turned to a partner and were given another 90 seconds to share what they wrote down and discuss. Pairs then took turns sharing what they discussed with the entire class.
- *Individual or group art projects*. (This activity was used twice—once individually and once in small groups.) Students were provided with art supplies and created a piece of artwork in response to a prompt and combined with some form of classroom sharing, similar to Think/Pair/Share.
- *Postcard writing activity*. (This activity was used once.) Students were provided with postcards and wrote a note to someone in response to a prompt.

- *Active listening exercises.* (This activity was used once.) Students were paired up and asked to listen to one another respond to a question or prompt for a timed period of 1–2 minutes. While one is speaking, the other was asked to listen without speaking.
- *General response to a prompt.* Students were given an opportunity to share their thoughts in response to a prompt, one at a time.

The field trip occurred near the end of the semester at a nearby art museum. Students were provided with field notebooks and worked in groups, taking notes as they toured the galleries in search of artwork connected to some of the topics discussed in class throughout the semester. The goal of both the icebreaker activities and the field trip was to allow students to build relationships with one another as the foundation for future dialogue. Participation in all these activities was voluntary and ungraded.

I recorded my reflections after each of these diapraxis activities. In each reflection, I noted my thoughts on the effectiveness of the activity and whether I noticed an increased level of discussion or dialogue.

### *Phase II: Interviews*

**Semi-Structured Interviews.** Over the years, I have conducted many semi-structured interviews, mainly for my work in community oral history projects. Oral history interviews differ from social science interviews because they aim to record an in-depth account of the interviewee's experience. In such interviews, even when the interviewer has a list of questions, the interviewee leads the interview. Oral histories are most similar to life histories, a data collection tool often used in anthropology and other social science research to "present insiders' views of culture and daily life" (Chase, 2010, p. 211). One notable difference between the two is that oral histories are preserved as an historical record, most often in an archive, as primary

sources for future historians (Oral History Association, 2018), while life histories and other interviews in the social sciences are often anonymized and the data kept for a limited period of time (usually a few years). However, in the cases of both oral histories and life histories, the resulting transcripts and recordings provide a narrative of memory and experience from which to extract qualitative data.

For this study, I adapted the interview technique I had used in my previous oral history interviews to record the reflections of the interviewees and allow them to partially lead the process while also discussing a series of topics I hoped to cover during the interviews. This process was structured but also open-ended enough to give the interviewees latitude. Unlike oral histories, and as is required by the Institutional Review Board, all subject data was anonymized and data from the interviews destroyed after a period of five years. This process was fully disclosed to the interviewees, as was their right to stop the interviews and/or remove portions of their responses from the data record for any reason.

I emailed all seventeen students who participated in the class after the ADD/DROP period, including those who withdrew after the midterm exam, on two separate occasions in March 2020 to solicit volunteers for interviews. Only two students responded. I also emailed the instructor with an interview request in April 2020, but she asked to postpone due to a family medical issue. Eventually, I conducted interviews with the two students in March and April 2020 and with the course instructor in December 2020. It is important to note that because of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent closure of the Ann University campus and rapid shift to virtual instruction in March of 2020, student participation was extremely difficult to solicit, and the instructor interview had to be significantly delayed. Also, because of COVID-19 restrictions and state-issued limits on gatherings, all interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom, a virtual

meeting software tool. With the interviewees' permission, I recorded and transcribed the audio of each interview.

To offset this lack of student participation and to collect data on the impact of the pandemic on student experience, I contacted the two students I interviewed and asked if they could participate in follow-up interviews. Only one responded, and I interviewed her in late December 2020. This interview served two purposes. First, the process allowed the student an opportunity to look back on the entire first year reflectively and provide additional qualitative data. Second, the interview provided longitudinal, albeit limited, data from the cohort of students involved in the study.

I generated interview tools after the course was finished and in response to observational data. I grouped the interview questions for both the students and instructor into four categories: class-specific questions, diapraxis-specific questions, questions about the first-year experience overall, and questions about the impact of the pandemic (see Appendices B and C). In the student follow-up interview, I asked the student to reflect on the entire first-year experience, the overall impact of COVID-19 on that experience, and the subsequent support given (or not given) to the students in response to the pandemic (see Appendix D).

**Methods for Data Analysis and Synthesis**

I analyzed data using a process of triangulation as outlined by LeCompte and Schensul (2012), whereby data is filed, reviewed, and coded for themes and patterns. Guiding models are then designed and redesigned. Throughout, the ethnographer takes notice of things in the data that are of key importance, and from that, findings "emerge." This "cognitive process of emergence" (LeCompte & Schensul, 2012, pp. 83–84) involves

- Noticing or perceiving

- Describing
- Defining
- Listing
- Classifying
- Comparing
- Contrasting
- Aggregating
- Ordering
- Establishing linkages and relationships
- Speculating

Once all the items of key importance have emerged, are noticed, and noted, the written analysis begins.

**Coding**

After a period of data review, I coded by way of a process called qualitative data *chunking* (LeCompte & Schensul, 2012) in the following manner:

- After each class meeting, I reviewed my notes and reflections (noted at the end of my fieldnotes).
- After each interview, I listened to the audio recording and made a transcription.
- Once all the data were collected, I reread all my field notes twice and made marginal descriptive notes, highlighted what I felt was important. Some questions in the back of my mind were: Did I notice anything interesting? Did my observations take on new meaning in light of the interview data?

- I reread all field notes and transcripts again together, this time noting any themes or trends that emerged as I read the data now while also reviewing the theoretical literature on the main areas of inquiry.
- From this review of the data, themes did emerge.

## Ethical Considerations

### *Subject Privacy and Consent*

I took care to ensure the privacy and protection of the research subjects in this study. I submitted an application which was approved by the Institutional Review Board of my home university for both Phases I and II. I informed participants about the study orally and in writing on the first day of class, and a signed informed consent form was obtained from all subjects for Phase I. The Phase I consent form stated that identifying details would be anonymized and kept private, that participation in any activities I facilitated was voluntary, and that participation, or a lack thereof, would not impact course grades. Throughout the course, I also tried to reassure students that I was not *the* teacher but rather an observer who also happened to be *a* teacher. This was a difficult line to maneuver, and it is not entirely clear if the students were able to distinguish between the two.

I anticipated that minimal to no harm would come to subjects from participating in the study. However, it is interesting to note that the course subject matter, which was out of my control, proved to be emotionally triggering for many of the students. I anticipated that this would be the case, to a certain extent, given my review of the literature and the proliferation of non-scholarly articles on the topic of classroom "safe spaces" and "trigger warnings" (Byron, 2017; Grinberg, 2016). I even made a note of this potential "harm" in the IRB application, and ultimately it proved to be even more of a factor and theme in this study than I predicted.

I designed a separate consent form for Phase II. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and distancing requirements, participants gave consent via email in response to the form I distributed to the two student-subject volunteers and the instructor-subject. As an incentive, students were given moderate compensation in the form of a gift card for their participation in Phase II.

***Researcher Biases***

As someone who had previously worked with undergraduate students, I came into this study with views and opinions on higher education, pedagogy, and the learning lives of first-year college students. These views informed my research but were also the source of some of my biases. One such bias was my expectations of first-year college students. When I first started teaching college, I had high expectations and set a high standard of academic rigor, which stemmed in part from the guidance provided by my mentor at the time. The history department in which I taught set guidelines for reading and writing expectations per course, set by course level. I soon learned that these expectations were unrealistic, as many students did not complete most of the assigned readings ahead of class sessions. Often, this made classroom discussions nearly impossible. I used various, often labor-intensive, techniques to get students to read the required texts and to submit work that measured up to the standard set by the department. I provided videos on course content, I "flipped the classroom" and worked with students on assignments during class time, I provided tutorials on using the library resources, and at one point, I required students to take and submit written notes on course readings. These remedies mitigated but did not fix the problems and challenges. Students continued to come to class unprepared. This was especially common with first- and second-year students. Thus, going into this study, I anticipated a similar level of day-to-day unpreparedness. Based on my previous teaching experience, I also

assumed that many of the students in the study would have difficulty writing academic essays, and this would impact their overall classroom performance and engagement.

Over time in my own teaching, I resolved to focus less on academic rigor and more on smaller, more manageable teaching moments. This shift has translated into a bias I now have against attempting to teach too much content to first-year college students and an evolving educational philosophy that favors teaching academic skills (college-level reading and writing) through a guided process, emphasizes the building of relationships between students and with faculty, and provides students with some useful tools for adult life. This is all to say that I no longer believe in assigning large amounts of scholarly reading or numerous writing assignments and am thus biased against forced rigor, at least at the first-year college level. I went into this study with these biases.

While I currently hold these opinions on pedagogy, I also went into this study with a bias that gives classroom instructors the benefit of the doubt. Knowing firsthand the challenges faced by teachers in creating lesson plans, providing assignment feedback, responding to student requests and questions, I tend to align myself more with the instructor than with the students when I am observing a classroom. Managing this bias was especially difficult during this study. There were many moments when I observed students acting disengaged or arriving unprepared for class, and my initial instinct was one of frustration with the students, even when I believed that the course content was beyond their grasp and despite my evolving views on first-year curricula.

**Issues of Trustworthiness**

I sought trustworthiness in two ways. First, to offset concerns about validity threats from the "rich" data extracted from observational studies, interviews were conducted to "counter the

twin dangers of respondent duplicity and observer bias" (Maxwell, 2010, p. 283) by making it difficult for respondents and me to mistakenly come to the same conclusions. Observations provided data from my own perspective as well as reflections by me on what I might be observing. The student and instructor interviews provided qualitative data directly. This precluded reliance on any one source of data. Phase II interviews were designed to solicit participants' reflections on their experiences in their own words. Second, during Phase I, my discussions with the instructor after class provided a "check" of sorts on what I perceived to be happening. Many times, the instructor validated or verified my own perceptions of what I observed just prior. At other times, the conversations forced me to further reflect on my observation in light of my conversations with her. This triangulation of data from multiple sources reduces the risk of biases due to reliance on any one method (Maxwell, 2010, p. 285).

**Limitations and Delimitations of the Study**

Qualitative research, like quantitative research, has its limitations and disadvantages. The sample size is often small, and the data analysis is not typically generalizable. This is especially true of a classroom ethnography. In this case, one FYS classroom of seventeen students and one instructor studying a sensitive topic during a year of unique circumstances is certainly not a representative sample. The class at the heart of this research study was and will be unlike any other FYS classes, past, present, or future. However, this is not to say that the data gathered from such a study does not provide some level of transferability. I argue that this one classroom, like other first-year classrooms across the United States, provides us with a view into many of the challenges facing 18- and 19-year-olds today. The students who participated in this study are different from students at other colleges or even other FYS classes at Ann University, yet they are also similar. The challenges of emerging adulthood during a period of political turmoil and

future economic uncertainty, now wrapped in a pandemic, are factors common to all of today's young adults. And the instructor in this study, while teaching within a specific area of expertise, is tackling challenges that exist in other college classrooms.

**Summary**

My decision to use an ethnographic approach in this research study was a personal one. I wanted to gather descriptive data at a level thicker than other methods allow and explore the group culture of seventeen students and one instructor in a single FYS classroom. Granted, this approach is not a fit for all researchers, but based on my experience and background, it was the best fit for my dissertation research. As stated earlier, I collected data through classroom observations in the 2019 fall semester and engaged in follow-up interviews during the 2020 spring and fall semesters. Due to the unanticipated COVID-19 pandemic, the interview sample size was smaller than I had hoped for and not ideal, and circumstances hindered my ability to solicit additional volunteers for follow-up interviews. Despite this small sample, the study provided interesting data, and I discuss these findings in the next chapter.

# Chapter Four: Findings

## *Yo Soy Yo y Mis Circustancias:* I Am Who I Am, And My Circumstances

At the start of one particularly memorable class during Phase 1 of my study, the course instructor wrote the above quote on the whiteboard. It is a slight adaptation of a famous maxim from 20th-century Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset (1930). While the course was a Spanish literature and media course, it was taught in English with translated texts, so the fact that she wrote something on the board in Spanish was unusual. After asking one Spanish-speaking student to translate the quote, she noted that in Spain, this saying suggests that we are all a product of our experiences. We cannot separate ourselves from our experiences, and we are whom we have become because of them. And, to an outsider, those experiences are not entirely evident. The instructor told the students that her reasons for doing the work that she does, much of it outside of the FYS class, all come as a result of her experiences.

This mini-lecture was not a lesson in Spanish philosophy nor meant to frame the Baroque Spanish literature discussed that day. Rather, it was a reflection by the instructor on the students' reactions to the readings—hyper-emotional, typically lacking depth, and stifling learning and progress in the class. It was also a gentle way to broach the subject of missing assignments. Here is a portion of her speech (paraphrased from my notes):

> The circumstances of my life can be my experiences both chosen and imposed on me. You don't know what all these are. What I choose to research in my work is gender studies, and I choose this because of my experiences. Think about where you are. You are in college, and this is a good time to take your circumstances, really think about what you are studying and the responsibilities and what this means as a college student. Respect your professor, your classmates and create a safe environment. We are slowing down

> because of your circumstances, but we cannot slow down anymore. Think about your essay. If you have not posted, you need to think about your responsibilities. Some circumstances come as experiences you are not choosing. I love being your teacher, and I hope you can respect that.

This speech struck me at the time as incredibly poignant and timely, and it has remained at the back of my mind. The saying, "I am who I am and my circumstances," also speaks volumes about my research, the first-year college experience, and this group of students. It will, therefore, serve as an overarching theme for this chapter. The first year of college is an experience that frames all subsequent college experiences. The challenge, however, lies in creating an experience that can manage students' previous experiences—both chosen and imposed upon them—to provide an education that best serves students and society in the future. The "circumstances" of the lives of the students and instructor affected the classroom dynamics in many ways, including the ability to foster authentic dialogue. Within this context, three sub-themes emerged from the data:

- College readiness and class (un)preparedness
- Hyper-emotional triggers
- The ethics of care and relationship-building

**College Readiness and Class (Un)Preparedness**

Admissions applications for the fall 2019 cohort of students at Ann University did not require applications to submit SAT or ACT test scores. This was the first year that Ann University was test-optional, and the instructor shared with me her concerns about this change, as she noticed a larger number of first-year students with accommodations[17] in her classes during

[17] Academic accommodations are provided for students who self-identify and provided documentation from heath care professionals to the Office of Disability Services at Ann University. This office works with students and faculty

the fall 2019 semester than in previous years. This concern stemmed not out of frustration with the students but from a concern about Ann University doing a disservice to the students who lacked college academic skills by admitting and enrolling them before they were ready to engage in college-level work. This lament about college students lacking the reading and writing skills needed for college-level work is common across American institutions of higher education, and the blame is often framed as a lack of rigor and lowered expectations in high schools and colleges more broadly. This assertion provides the foundation of *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (Arum & Roksa, 2011), in which the authors argued that a lack of rigor lies at the heart of all the academic woes on today's college campuses. It also reinforced the view by college faculty that high schools do not adequately prepare graduates to meet the expectations they will face in college classes (Hart Research Associates, 2015).[18]

And yet, the instructor did not blame parents and students (at least she did not voice these types of concerns) and instead suggested that whatever the reasons, the task of preparing students for college, after acceptance, is the responsibility of the colleges that enroll them. Having worked with faculty members who complained about student unpreparedness at other colleges in similar circumstances, I found this an interesting perspective and unusual. To offset some of the challenges of college, particularly for those first-year students lacking college readiness skills, the instructor provided students with opportunities for assistance and support whenever possible. For example, at one point after the midterm, she asked students to discuss the characters of

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to facilitate agreements on appropriate adjustments for improved access to the overall college experience. Accommodations might include extended deadlines for assignments, tutors, converted textbooks, or special classroom tools.

[18] A 2015 College Readiness Study conducted by the nonprofit educational organization Achieve found that 78% of all faculty surveyed believed that public high schools were NOT adequately preparing graduates to meet the expectations they will face in college classes in response to the question: *Do you feel that as a whole, public high schools are adequately preparing graduates to meet the expectations they will face in college classes, or not?* This percentage increased to 82% among faculty at colleges with less/non selective admissions policies.

assigned reading and called individual students one at a time into the hallway. I was not privy to what she wished to discuss at the time, and I noticed that she only asked a few of the students to meet with her. After class, she shared with me that she met with the students who had not submitted the first essay assignment so that she could discuss the situation with each one privately and provide help if needed. As an aside, I mentioned the lack of any real substantive discussion on the readings while she was out of the room, and she told me that she felt that meeting with students, in this case, was more important, even if it meant delaying the more substantive content discussions a little longer. At that moment, I appreciated her willingness to suspend whatever content lessons she had previously planned in favor of providing support.

My observational data noted many instances of a lack of preparedness for class, mainly in regard to course readings. Because I was not the course instructor, it is impossible for me to know if this was due to a lack of college reading readiness or, for some other reason, an unconscious or conscious decision by students not to complete the readings prior to class. During the previously mentioned class, when students met individually with the instructor in the hallway, I walked around the room and noticed one or two students trying to give a summary of the story to classmates, which indicated a level of class camaraderie. However, the recap of the reading and the main characters was not at all correct, something I knew because I had completed the assigned readings along with the students. The reading assignments were challenging in both depth and length. I say this as a doctoral student with experience reading long, complex texts, albeit typically not in the field of Spanish literature. That the students did not fully grasp some of the more nuanced meaning in the readings did not surprise me. Again, college is by its very nature the place to further hone critical reading skills, and first-year students are at the start of this skill-building journey. I was also not surprised by the fact that

students attempted to, as the saying goes, "wing it" by skimming the readings, as this is a skill most students resort to at some point in their formal education. What was surprising was the extent to which some of the students tried to debate issues related to the content of the readings in the absence of a close reading of those same texts. I will discuss this as it relates to emotional triggers in the next section.

I believe that most of the students did not understand that, at its core, the class was a literature course. The course description provided to students at orientation did not clearly articulate the nature of the course or the field of study. In fact, when searching the course catalog, I was unable to find a course description beyond "This course focuses on a specific topic in Humanities," and the title said nothing about Spain or literature. And while some of the other FYS courses did include a one-paragraph description for potential registrants, five of the eleven different FYS course options did not include a one-paragraph description in the course catalog. Therefore, it is entirely possible that the students enrolled in the FYS class I observed did not fully comprehend that they were enrolling in a Spanish literature and media course. The two students I interviewed said as much. When I asked Student A why she enrolled in the course, she said:

> [at orientation] I actually ended up sitting next to Student C, who, and then we became friends after that, which is really cool … and she thought it was interesting, so, I was like, maybe I'll take the same one. And I was also looking and none of the other ones seemed appealing and everything else was already filled. So I was like, let's pick this one, it has an interesting title and I'll know someone in it. And that was just kind of my basis. I had no idea what it was about 'cause they didn't have the descriptions and I just picked it.

Student B also mentioned the importance of having a friend or acquaintance when choosing her FYS class:

> I was sitting next to I think Student D … And we're just, like, "What are you picking for your first choice seminar?" And I was, like, "I think I'm gonna either do prison studies or beautiful violence." And she goes, "Okay, will you do beautiful violence with me, so I'm not alone?" I was, like, "Yes."… I'd rather know somebody on my first day of classes than nobody. So yeah, that was actually how we got to pick that class.

When I asked, "Was there a good description of it? Did you understand what it would be about?" Student B responded with:

> I knew, like, the general idea was going to be, um, all about, like, women's suffrage and all that stuff … The initial list [course description] is just, like, goes into cultural ideas of, um, women's abuse, women's rights, and women.

I think it important to note here that the course was not about women's suffrage. The topic was gender-based violence in Spain and the depictions of women and beauty in literature, film, and the visual arts from the 17$^{th}$ to the 21$^{st}$ centuries. It is interesting, however, to hear Student B's interpretation of what she recalls from orientation about selecting her FYS class within the context of having completed the course. This post-FYS description of the class reinforces my belief that students did not fully understand what type of course they were enrolling in, even while fully immersed in the class or after having completed it. To further illustrate this point, after saying that the one thing she would change about the course would be the amount of reading, Student B said the following in response to the question, "How did the amount of reading compare to some of your other classes?"

> A lot more than the other classes…The only one I could really compare it to would probably have been my, um, English composition course 'cause, like, English. So you're going to be reading a lot, but even then, sometimes I feel, like, we had just, like, articles on top of articles and have articles and I was never able to catch up.

Thus, Student B did not make the connection between an English class and a Spanish class and how both might require one to read a lot of literature and articles to provide context.

It appears that students were also not given a lot of information on the purpose and goals of a first-year seminar more generally. While the course catalog says the following about the first-year seminar:

> The goal of this analytical seminar is to enhance the level of problem solving skills of students based upon multiple theoretical frameworks, intensive interdisciplinary reading and writing assignments, explorations of primary texts, documents, artifacts, etc. Here students and animated faculty guide inquiry regarding the evolution of ideas and meaning in scientific, historical, political, economic and psycho-social and cultural contexts. Some of the courses that meet the general education distribution requirements may also meet the requirements in a major the student selects. This allows for integration as well as breadth and depth of knowledge as the student progresses through the college experience. (Ann University 2019-2020 Undergraduate Course Catalog)

It is unclear if these goals were fully explained to students during orientation. Student A remembered the following from her summer orientation: “I remember just being told you have to take a first-year seminar. I didn't know what that was. They were just like, it's a class that you have to take as a freshman.”

Submitting written assignments also proved to be a challenge for some of the students, as noted by the earlier example of seven students needing to meet with the instructor to discuss their missing essays, and, after the midterm exam/essay, four students either withdrew or stopped attending the class.

I did not read any of the student essays, so I cannot comment on the quality of their written work. However, I know from my conversations with the instructor that the students needed significant feedback, something she was happy to provide and which she considered an important responsibility. Despite essay writing being a weakness for many students, the two students I interviewed enjoyed the assignments, at least to the extent that they found them useful. Student B stated:

> the writing I didn't mind that much. The writing I actually—it helps me kind of figure out where my point of view was coming from. So I actually liked the writings.

Student A:

> I liked the amount of writing assignments we had, um, because she [the instructor] always gave feedback and it was—like the feedback that she gave was very like positive and she always had like—She was always very positive and like welcoming to the fact that we were freshmen and she was there to help us like kind of adjust to Ann, and like all the feedback I got on my writing assignments was very positive and she was like, the only thing I would change is like this, but overall this is really great.

A lack of college-level reading and writing skills in a first-year class is not unusual. In fact, college is the appropriate place to work on these skills and improve upon them. However, the task of responding fully to students' written work can become daunting and overwhelming for faculty. Most college professors are experts in their field and are not trained in pedagogy or

in how to teach college-level reading and writing. This challenge is further exacerbated by faculty also needing to manage the social-emotional needs of students, most often without training on mental health counseling and appropriate methods for assisting emerging adults. This latter issue, especially within the context of emotionally triggering content, proved to be the most challenging.

**The Contagious Nature of Emotional Triggers**

Trigger warnings, or preemptive warnings that prepare participants in advance of potentially upsetting language or subject matter, have become commonplace on syllabi and within classrooms on college campuses. The course in this study had the following in the syllabus:

> The content and discussion in this course will necessarily engage with gender-based violence every week. Much of it will be emotionally and intellectually challenging to engage with. I will flag especially graphic or intense content that discusses or represents violence and will do my best to make this classroom a space where we can engage bravely, empathetically and thoughtfully with difficult content every week.

The reasons for this warning were understandable, as some of the course materials, two of the films especially, included acts of violence against women. Students sometimes come into these topics with past trauma, which can be further exacerbated by seeing or reading about similar experiences as those they may have endured. Having shown the films and used the course readings many times before, the instructor anticipated these issues, hence the statement in the syllabus; additionally, she provided students with a gentle warning before films that might be triggering and indicated that they were free to leave the room if needed.

Trigger warnings are controversial. Over the past few years, critics outside and within the academy have questioned whether trigger warnings and a desire to create safe spaces on college campuses have gone too far. Some argue that it erodes freedom of speech. Others argue that it coddles students and allows them to self-infantilize. Both of these arguments are tied to larger political debates and criticisms of higher education being too liberal, and this, too, is tied into criticisms of helicopter parenting more broadly—debates that will not be explored here. One criticism, however, that is relevant to this research study is the argument that trigger warnings and policies about safe spaces too easily allow students to avoid uncomfortable topics and discussions with those who disagree with them and that these habits follow them into the post-college world.

Early in the semester, over the course of three class periods, the class watched the Spanish film *Take My Eyes*. The film is about domestic partner abuse, and prior to showing the film, the instructor briefly discussed the film's subject matter. During the first class, when the film was shown, only one student left the classroom, and the instructor went out to check on her. The other students were visibly upset and said as much during a short discussion before class was dismissed. During the next class meeting, the class continued to watch the film, this time with a more pointed warning from the instructor about potential triggers and a pre-film discussion with students about the film so far and what specifically was upsetting for them in terms of the characters, the story, etc. Some background was also provided by the instructor on the film directors and the historical context of the film. At times, students looked upset while watching the film, but no one left the room. During the third class, when the final portion of the film was shown, the instructor warned students that one scene in particular was likely to upset some of them. During this screening, four of the fourteen students in attendance left the room,

and at one point, three of them were out in the hallway and did not return until after the film was finished. After the film concluded, the instructor asked students to write a response to a question I had earlier used as a prompt for an arts-based icebreaker activity: *How does culture impact our views of intimate partner violence?* The responses were full of emotion, and one student was so emotional she left class and never returned at all.

The reactions of the students while watching this film, and in all subsequent classes when the issues of partner violence were broached in the course materials, were hyper-emotional in a manner that often impeded learning and discussions. For example, at one point during the screening of *Take My Eyes*, the instructor tried to get students to return and see the "hope" built into the end of the film. However, the students who left earlier refused to return until after the film was over. The discussion after the film was filled with an intense anger toward the husband-abuser in the film. I should point out that the film is not gratuitous in its depiction of domestic abuse. In fact, physical abuse is alluded to and never shown. And while partner abuse is quite upsetting for most of us, in this class, the students' emotional reactions made entering into discussions that focused on critical analysis impossible at times.

The instructor had shown the film for thirteen years to many groups of students, including high school students, and was quite taken aback by this class's reactions. After class, she spoke at length with me and another colleague she had asked to join our discussion. The instructor was most upset by the way in which one student left the film, slamming the door on her way out. She was also concerned about how the students reacted to a lovemaking scene in the film between the husband and wife. Several students said that it was not consensual, something that was not even alluded to in the film. And, the issue of consent, or lack thereof, was something

the students came back to again and again, even in the discussions of Baroque era literature, when it was made clear that the concept of consent did not exist.

Throughout the semester, a lack of consent was often used as a reason for not wanting to further probe into the reading assignments. One student in particular, Student E, was often vocal about her dislike of many of the male characters in the readings and films and would dominate the discussions with harsh criticisms of the assignments based on these feelings. Comments like "I hate this film/play/story" were common comments from this student, and at one point, the instructor asked, "Why do you hate the story?" to probe, and the response was "I see it as personal," suggesting that the material struck a chord related to personal trauma. The bigger challenge was how this infected the classroom environment and impeded the possibility of engaging in a critical, academic analysis of the course material. The students' dislike of the readings or films became an excuse for not completing the assigned readings or critically discussing the readings within the context of the historical period in which they were written. And, most importantly, they resisted analyzing the course materials holistically.

Other students were triggered for different reasons, some of which were not entirely clear, but which I interpreted to be likely the result of personal trauma. Student F would often cry in class and then need to leave and sometimes not return. On one occasion, she went into the hallway and cried so loudly that we were informed that it could be heard in the surrounding classrooms. The instructor went out to speak with her, and I later learned that the instructor recommended to her that she go to the counseling center. These hyper-emotional reactions, the source of which was not always clear, nor at times seemed connected to a particular classroom discussion, were distracting and hard to ignore by everyone in the classroom, myself included.

On another occasion, Student G approached the instructor after class while I was still in the room to ask that she not walk behind them because this was their trigger. The instructor was visibly upset afterward, and we spoke about it for several minutes. While she wanted to be sensitive to the needs of the students, she noted that it was difficult for her to avoid walking behind Student G, that she needed to walk around to feel comfortable teaching. She also worried about the world beyond the Ann University. Student G would need to find a way to manage this sensitivity at some point because it was unrealistic to ask people to avoid walking behind them. During another class, Student G left in the middle of class and did not return until after class was finished. They said they were going through some personal matters and needed to go to the counseling center. The instructor said she could go with them, but this offer was declined.

Student F withdrew from the class, and Student G stopped attending after the midterm. The instructor recommended withdrawal to four students, including both of these students, because of poor academic performance. Sadly, the instructor was unable to determine what happened to Student G and became quite concerned. While I was not privy to private medical information about any of the students, I suspected, as I noted before, that some type of trauma or mental health issue was at the heart of these two students' reactions, which is a growing challenge for all those in higher education entrusted with the care of college students. Research conducted in 2018 suggests that Generation Z adolescents and young adults (born after 1992) are struggling with many issues, including loneliness (Cigna, 2018), depression, and suicidal ideation (Twenge et al., 2018). The most current research, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting shifts in increased remote learning, suggest an increase in these rates. Thus, the impact of mental health wellness and illness will continue to be a factor in classroom dynamics for most first-year faculty.

On many occasions during the fall 2019 semester, I sensed the challenges faced by the instructor in teaching such a hyper-emotional FYS class. She also spoke of her frustrations and the difficulty in providing a safe and comfortable classroom environment while also teaching the course content. When asked about these challenges during her interview, she said:

> I think that was the hardest class I ever taught because there were so many emotions involved in the class that it was very difficult to get into the content of the class and the dynamics of what the first-year seminar should be, which is again, critical thinking, writing and reading because students felt triggered many times from many different directions. It was just hard emotionally for them. It was hard emotionally for me because I really wanted to move on and support them, but I couldn't.

Thus, the instructor felt the challenge of teaching in a classroom filled with so much emotion that it directly impacted her ability to teach the course in the manner to which she was accustomed.

**Ethics of Care in Teaching and Relationship Building**

An experienced teacher, like the instructor in this research study, learns from a teaching challenge and uses the experience to better manage similar situations in the future. The past cannot be altered nor mistakes corrected, but one can aim to do better the next time. Noddings (2012) advocated for an ethic of care in education that prioritizes the needs of the students above the needs of the curriculum. This ethic is relational in nature and requires a response from teachers to the expressed needs of students. Noddings distinguished between "caring about" and "caring for" students, the latter of which requires "the establishment of relation" (ThePublicVoiceSalon, 2018). She suggested that we can "care about" many things and not "care for" in a way that improves the situation. For higher education instructors, "caring about" translates into a focus on learning outcomes or academic rigor. "Caring for" means finding a way

to respond to the needs of students, even when that requires setting aside a lesson plan or revising an assignment, sometimes on the spot.

The instructor began the semester by telling students the following (paraphrased from notes): "This is the class to make mistakes. You're growing as thinkers" to emphasize the newness of their college experience. And, at various points in the semester, especially during the first few weeks, she would gently remind students to carefully read their emails, check Blackboard for assignments, and contact her if they ran into difficulties. She also regularly checked in with students at the beginning of each class by asking how their week or weekend was going and if they were running into any problems outside of her class. Perhaps most importantly, she adjusted the readings and assignments throughout the semester, which demonstrated her ability to care *for* her students and respond to their needs.

As I noted earlier, it became clear within the first few classes that students were not coming to class prepared. Whether this was due to an inability to keep up or from a conscious decision to not complete the readings is unclear. Regardless of the reasons, the processes of both teaching and learning were hindered by this lack of preparedness. The instructor was clearly frustrated by this lack of preparedness, especially in the situations when the students cast blame on technology failures or having missed a class. However, her response would ultimately shift into a mode of "caring for" the students by adjusting her expectations or revising lesson plans.

During her interview, the instructor shared the following about how she responded to her difficult experience in the fall of 2019:

> I have to tell you, that was very hard for me, but I learned a lot. Actually, after that class, I took a workshop on mental health and how to support students in the classroom. Because of my experiences with these students, I was able to understand more about the

> workshop and that's why I think that now I'm better prepared in a pandemic because of the three elements together. It was a very hard course for me to teach, but it really made me be a better educator.

While it was difficult for her during the experience to fully care for her students in the manner that she would have liked, she turned the experience into an opportunity to learn and better care for her future students.

***Relationship-Building in the Classroom***

The ethic of care is relational in nature. In teaching, it requires the instructor to care for her students by actively listening to their expressed needs and responding in kind. It also requires an approach to classroom teaching and management that encourages students to care for one another and which fosters a capacity to care for others in the world beyond the classroom. Some relationships developed organically in the FYS class in my study. Both of the students I interviewed had already developed friendships with a classmate during orientation, and in the case of Student A, this friendship grew much stronger over the course of the fall semester: "[At orientation] I actually ended up sitting next to Student C who, and then we became friends after that, which is really cool. And we're-we're still really good friends, it's awesome." Over the course of the semester, I witnessed friendships developing between students. This was especially true at tables, as the room was set-up with chairs around four tables, and students tended to sit at the same table during each class. Students A and C sat at the same table throughout the semester, and their friendship was evident to me prior to my interview with Student A.

Students also bonded through classroom activities. Early in the semester, the class acted out a play they were reading. The exercise helped the students better grasp the Baroque era concepts in the readings, and it was also a fun activity that students appeared to enjoy. (Student

B expressly stated that she enjoyed the activity.) They learned to work together and got to know one another. This was done in class without outside preparation or practice, and this allowed for a less structured environment. A group assignment served a similar purpose, although it was graded and more academic by design. Each student was assigned to a group to present at various points in the semester after the end of a unit, and each group presented one time. The work was done outside of class meetings, so I do not know how much time was spent by each group meeting and working together.

***Diapraxis as a Tool for Relationship Building***

One of the main goals of the diapraxis activities I facilitated was to help students learn more about one another and connect on a relational level. I provided a total of seven icebreaker activities, and each incorporated a prompt or series of prompts to stimulate reflective responses.

1. Arts-based individual activity: *How does culture impact our views of intimate partner violence?* Students were supplied with art supplies and asked to individually create a piece of art in response to this question. After a few minutes, we went around the room, and each student briefly shared something about their art. While this was early in the semester, this icebreaker yielded some deep and emotional insights. Students were willing to share with the class and listened attentively to one another.
2. Arts-based group activity: *What is honor?* Students were provided with art supplies and asked to create a group art project at tables based on the prompt. Each group then shared their project and discussion with the rest of the class. Students reacted quite negatively to this question and were less cooperative. During the time given for creating the art projects, one of the groups scribbled "Honor is BS" on the poster paper provided to them and then began talking about other topics unrelated to class. Prior to this activity, the

class was reading and discussing a play in which a man has to kill his wife to protect his honor, and this caused some significant emotional reactions, which, as was discussed previously, hindered discussions.

3. Think/pair/share: *What is the meaning of exemplary?* Students were given 90 seconds to jot down a response to this question, then share their response with the partner for another 90 seconds. We then went around the room and asked each pair to share something from their discussion. This icebreaker was impromptu, and I noticed that students tended to repeat the responses of earlier pairs as we went around the room.
4. Active listening activity: *What is the role played by a narrator's gender in stories about women?* In pairs, students were asked to listen to their partner respond to the prompt for two (2) minutes without interrupting and then switch. Students were unable to listen without interrupting or being distracted for such a long duration of time. I asked students to share what they experienced, and several students indicated that they had sensory issues or were distracted by background noise. And while the activity was not an overall success, it was informative. If, as was noted in an earlier chapter, dialogue is more about listening than speaking, then active listening skills are really lacking among young adults, and exercises like this are necessary even when they are difficult, if only to help build these skills. In the future, I would use this activity in an incremental way and build from one minute up to two minutes.
5. Think/pair/share: *What is feminism in 19th century Spain?* Responses were not long and, much like the first think/pair/share, similar to one another in the full group share. However, I wrote in my fieldnotes that students were "much more willing to think of the question historically" and without the emotional reactions of some of the earlier class

discussions. There could be many reasons for this, but in my fieldnotes, I hypothesized that it was related to the subject matter being discussed, which was a 19th-century feminist writer that students seemed to better identify and relate with.

6. Postcard activity: *Think of a storyteller you like or who influenced you (can be a person in your life or an author) and write a note to them on a postcard.* I provided each table of students with a selection of blank postcards and gave students several minutes to think about the prompt and write a note. I also offered stamps to anyone who might wish to send their postcard. I then asked students if they wanted to share a little about whom they wrote to. Two interesting things came out of this activity. First, some students admitted that they did not know how postcards "work" as they had never written a postcard or sent one in the mail and did not understand where to put the note vs. the mailing address. To remedy this, I provided a quick tutorial on postcard writing and mailing. The second is that a couple of students were quite taken by the artwork on the postcards and asked if they could take a few blank cards home. Student B used her postcards to decorate her room and pointed them out to me when I asked about the activities in our first interview together.
7. Individual share: *Share with us something that you are grateful for.* This was a quasi-icebreaker activity on the last day of class. Prior to asking each student to respond, I had given each student a small "thank you" gift and told them how appreciative and grateful I was for the opportunity to observe and participate in their class. This icebreaker was not planned or connected in any way to the course material, but I wanted to include it in this analysis because of the depth of the responses. Students were open and listened to one

another. I sensed a moment of bonding, despite this class being the last time they would meet in the semester.

In addition to the icebreaker activities highlighted above, I also took the class on a field trip to a local art museum. I met students at the museum, provided them with their own field journals and a pencil, and divided them up into four groups. Each group was asked to look for art from a period or theme discussed in class. We all reconvened after half an hour, and groups shared a little about what they found or, in some cases, did not find. Students were then free to explore the museum on their own. This was not a graded activity. Student observations were not as important as the opportunity to do something outside of the classroom and for students to spend time together as a group.

Upon reflection, and based on the classroom data I just shared, I have a few thoughts on the diapraxis activities as a whole. First, based on my own teaching experience and the result of the final activity on the last day of class, in the future, I would do more activities that are relational and not necessarily connected to the course content. For example, I have asked students in my own classes to share something about a favorite children's book or talk about an important mentor or teacher. I found it more difficult to use non-academic questions in a classroom that was not my own and in which I was not in control of the entire lesson planning process. I now realize that these types of getting-to-know-you questions are essential to the building of relationships in class between students and with the instructor. Second, I hoped to get students to work together on the group art projects with the second icebreaker activity, but now I realize that this is a difficult thing to do without preparation. Some of the students in the FYS class were studying art or art therapy, and their artistic skills may have been intimidating to the non-art students. The individual arts-based projects, however, were much more conducive to

individual expression and skill level. Finally, as I noted before, first-year students need practice in active listening. Painful as it was, the active listening exercise highlighted the need for these types of activities, but in a progressive manner.

**Circumstances That Help and Hinder Authentic Dialogue**

The circumstances of this class and the past experiences of all those in the fall 2019 FYS class impacted the ability of the group to engage in dialogue in many ways. First, student unpreparedness made it difficult to move beyond a recap of the readings and delve into a deeper discussion of the course themes. As was discussed earlier, it was evident to me that students often came to class having not completed the assigned readings. Student B admitted that she did not complete several of the reading. The instructor had to devote significant time to lecturing on the who, what, when, and where of the readings. Because most students were unfamiliar with the basics of Spanish history and Baroque era literature, background information had to be presented; however, the need to summarize the stories took up additional time. One cannot fully participate in a discussion with any level of depth or analysis on a subject without having completed the assignments to prepare. To go a step further and engage in authentic dialogue requires a firm grasp on the underlying topic at hand, which was not the case with this group of students.

The contagious nature of emotions in the class also hindered dialogue. The subject matter triggered deep emotional reactions on the part of many of the students, and this limited the class's ability to discuss the topics in a historical and critical manner. The underlying "circumstances" and experiences of the students made an academic discussion of 17$^{th}$-century literary characters nearly impossible at times, as they were always viewed through the lens of a 21$^{st}$ century

emerging adult. I sensed that the theme of gender-based violence was personal for some of the students. In my interview with the instructor, she mentioned a similar observation:

> I think my class probably attracted students who wanted to be there because of personal experiences themselves and perhaps thought it was going to be a more therapeutical kind of class as opposed to a more academic and critical class.

The therapeutic needs of the students within the context of an academic course created a disconnect between the emotional needs of the students and the stated educational goals of the course.

These two issues—unpreparedness and emotional triggers—reinforce the feelings about first-year programs that I have now held for many years: first-year programs need to address these growing challenges *before* bringing students into the more resolutely academic goals of the college curriculum. On more than one occasion, the instructor stressed that Ann University needed to do more to prepare its first-year students for the expectations of college. In her interview, she said the following:

> My idea, and this will not happen, would be to have courses in the summer before they get to their full first semester so that we can really get them into that rhythm of, this is what your quality education is going to be about. As I was saying before, our students don't come to college prepared, and it will be good to have a very intensive course on reading and writing, for example. By doing that, everybody, they would start creating that community that they need as college students.

This idea is not new. Upward Bound, a federally funded program, does exactly what she is suggesting (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). However, this has traditionally targeted low-income students, and the instructor is advocating for a summer program that reaches a much

broader swath of incoming students. I would take this suggestion a step further and recommend redesigning the entire first semester with pass/fail courses that teach the basics of college-level reading and writing and postpone content-based courses until the second semester of the first year. This model could also provide more time for students to manage their social-emotional wellbeing during the high school-to-college transition and incorporate opportunities for students to build relationships with one another for the purpose of improving active listening skills and learning how to participate in authentic dialogue. Diapraxis-rooted activities, such as those used in this research study but on a larger scale, could help with this process.

The final sub-theme of this study, the ethics of care and relationship building, highlights one factor that helps rather than hinders authentic dialogue. When the instructor showed a willingness to respond to the circumstances of her class, during the semester and after, the students benefited and responded in kind. Students also benefited from relationships built with their classmates. Both students interviewed mentioned friendships they made and the value of those relationships to managing the challenges of the first semester. However, both students also admitted to not really remembering the classmates who withdrew from the class. I had the following conversation with Student A about the impact of the departure of four students from the class:

> Researcher: in your class it was kind of unusual because you had so many students leave before the end of the semester. How do you think that impacted the class? Was it jarring in any way? Did it bring you all closer together because you were a smaller group?
>
> Student A: I honestly don't remember who left and I think that kind of speaks a lot to it because you ended up getting really close to the people who were there every, like every

> time the class met and like, it was just a smaller environment where you would like laugh together

Student A did not say this to be callous or cruel, but it saddened me. It saddened me to think that the students withdrew before getting an opportunity to feel the same sense of bonding as Student A felt with the other students. It also made me realize that first-year students need better mechanisms for developing relationships that encourage "caring for" one another so they can find ways to support their classmates in times of need.

**Diapraxis as a Bridge**

As has been stated earlier in this dissertation, authentic dialogue is difficult to engage in without preparation and practice. And, because dialogic experiences are often lacking for many incoming first-year students, the college curriculum could benefit from tools and classroom techniques that serve as a bridge to dialogue. Diapraxis-inspired programs and activities, such as those used in this study, but which could go well beyond if applied to service learning and learning communities, are possible tools to bridge the gap between no-dialogue and authentic dialogue. The most important factor in the ultimate success of these tools, I believe, is low-stakes implementation, i.e., making participation voluntary and ungraded. The goal of any bridge to dialogue should involve the group ending in a place of dialogue, not in a graded assignment. A broader, overarching goal of diapraxis bridges to authentic dialogue should be the creation of an experience, or circumstance, that allows students to learn how to care for one another and to attain a personal toolkit that allows them to care for others and communicate more effectively in their post-college adult lives. In my mind, this latter goal is the most important component of a successful college program, and this will be discussed in the next and final chapter of this dissertation.

# Chapter Five: Return to Theory

The literature on dialogue, diapraxis, and emerging adulthood into which I immersed myself to prepare for this dissertation has new meaning when examined within the context of the data collected in this research study. Theory, when examined in isolation, feels certain and makes sense, until it is tested. However, value is still gained from reflection upon theory and new views of what the theory may or may not mean in the real world. This final chapter will explore the following two questions:

1. *What did I learn from my research about theories of dialogue and diapraxis?*
2. *What are the cognitive/emotive traits of emerging adulthood, and how do these traits impact a student's ability to participate in dialogue in the college classroom?*

I will also discuss the implications of these theoretical applications on my findings for the preparation of adults for 21st-century responsibilities.

## Making Space for Dialogue

When I first began to research dialogue theories, one of the first papers I wrote was titled “Making Space for Dialogue." At the time, I believed, based on my preliminary and limited research, that dialogue required practice, which, in turn, required an instructor to set aside significant time for this practice. The problem with real-world application of this early work was twofold. First, I was only just beginning my research and had not fully reviewed the literature on dialogue, which was extensive in breadth and depth. The second problem was related to practicality. Most colleges did not have space in their class schedules for the time required for the instructional methods that I believed were needed. For this reason, in the Fall of 2018, I designed a First-Year Experience program that included space for practice in dialogue throughout the first year, but which required a complete rethinking of the first-year experience.

However, I knew my design (which can be viewed at https://sites.google.com/view/cfye/home) was only theoretical and unlikely to be implemented, so I stepped away from it to work on my dissertation research.

From my dissertation research, I have learned that my instincts were not unfounded. It is nearly impossible to find space for dialogue in the typical first-year seminar. Faculty in first-year programs are given the impossible task of teaching content while also serving as therapists, advisors, and providing academic support in the basics of college-level reading and writing. The instructor was an incredibly competent, kind, and experienced teacher, yet the challenges of her first-year seminar were almost more than she could bear. Asking faculty to add the facilitation of dialogue into their responsibilities would be unfair and unrealistic. The barriers to dialogue are many. In addition to time and space in the schedule, I identified the following from my research study:

***Lack of Active Listening Skills***

Saunders (2011) defined dialogue as "one person listening carefully and deeply enough to another to be changed by what he or she hears" (p. 283). As has been stated previously, this suggests that dialogue is more about listening than talking and was thus incorporated into my own definition of dialogue as

> the two-way communication of two or more people willing to actively listen to one another in a respectful and equitable manner, in which participants consciously attempt to suspend assumptions and are open to the possibility of changing their own perspectives.

The data from this study suggest that many 18- and 19-year-olds are unable to listen actively at a level needed for authentic dialogue. This lack of active listening skills is not meant to be an indictment on young adults, only an observation. For reasons beyond the scope of this research

study, be they developmental, social, or academic, instructional methods that address this skill area may need to be addressed before attempts at authentic dialogue or as part of a broader pedagogy that addresses all aspects of dialogue.

### *Caring for Others Requires Time for Relationship-Building*

When I first began to research classroom dialogue, I read some of Nel Noddings' work on the ethics of care in teaching but did not dive into her work deeply. However, in the process of analyzing the data from this study, Noddings' work stood out to me as vitally important on many levels. First, she clearly states that teachers need to not only infer the needs of their students but also be attuned to their expressed needs. The instructor demonstrated her ability to do this by shifting her lesson plans and building in time to address student challenges. She also reflected after the course had concluded as to how she might improve when confronted with student social-emotional challenges in the future and took it upon herself to enroll in a workshop on this topic.

The second aspect of Noddings' (2012) work that stood out to me was the importance of building trust and relationships. The ethics of care in teaching is not just about teachers caring for students, it is about guiding students toward caring *for* one another (as opposed to simply caring *about*) and learning how to care for those in the world outside the classroom. This requires a building of trust and this, she notes, is a prerequisite for dialogue. I saw glimmers of students building trust and caring for one another in the FYS class. Trust is predicated on the existence of relationships and through opportunities to get to know one another. Both Students A and B mentioned friendships that they had built with classmates, but at one point Student A suggested that she did not even notice that four students withdrew from the class toward the end

of the semester. Students did not have the time, space, and opportunity to develop a caring for one another, so the circumstances were beyond their control.

Finally, and this is related to the above discussion of trust and relationship building, Noddings at one point in a 2018 interview (ThePublicVoiceSalon, 2018), advocated for schooling in which students and teachers are together for longer periods of time. Her point of reference was middle school, yet I believe this advice would also improve first-year college programming. As was previously discussed, college is a period of transition that benefits from support. While not common, some first-year programs are one year long,[19] and I would certainly advocate for a revised first-year program at Ann University that allows students and FYS faculty to stay together for a full year, a program that, ideally, incorporates time (and space) for students to build relationships with one another through teaching methods, such as the diapraxis activities highlighted in this paper, and which builds trust and potentially provides a bridge to authentic dialogue.

**Emerging Adults in the College Classroom**

The social-emotional needs of students in this study were significant and, at times, disruptive to the process of learning. The students often validated Arnett's (2000, 2004, 2015) emerging adulthood theory, particularly in relation to the "self-focus" theme of his work. This, in turn, further validated Kegan's (1994) theory of the 2nd order of consciousness, whereby individuals are unable to care about their own actions in relation to the feelings and needs of others. At times, the classroom was one steeped in self-concern triggered by the content of the course. As harsh as this sounds, I say this not to suggest we tell students to be tougher, stronger, or more resilient, but to highlight the fact that the social-emotional needs of the students in this

[19] A 2009 survey by the National Research Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition found that only 3.8% of respondents reported having a year-long first-year seminar program.

age group sometimes require professional therapeutic aid. Student B's discussion of her own mental health challenges put a spotlight on something I have noticed myself as a parent and have heard from others—colleges do not have enough mental health staff to fully meet the needs of the students they serve. First-year faculty cannot be expected to provide these services, and students cannot fully participate in the process of learning until their mental health needs are addressed. Furthermore, authentic dialogue requires participants to, as noted above, care for and listen to one another, and this is unlikely to happen when one is unable to focus because of pain or trauma. Diapraxis can aid in this process and can be therapeutic, particularly through the process of storytelling and story-sharing, but only to a limited degree, and it cannot take the place of professional mental health care.

**Preparing Emerging Adults for 21st Century Adult Responsibilities**

Today's emerging adults will one day be adults responsible for managing a world full of crises and challenges. As adults, 10, 20, or 30 years from now, the students in the instructor's first-year seminar will need tools to effectively work with other adults to find solutions to the multitude of problems that plague American society today and the unknown problems that evolve in the future. It is clear, based on the current racial and ethnic tensions and inequities and the political events of the past few years, that we cannot continue with the status quo of not knowing how to speak to one another on issues that are ideologically or politically charged. Engaging in conversations with people across differences requires enough practice in dialogue to develop dialogic habits, and these habits require caring for others. Given where we are as a society, I suspect most of us adults were not provided with this practice, so perhaps it is time to focus on the next generation of adults. Diapraxis may provide one avenue to dialogue and improved communication skills.

**Crafting a 21st Century Higher Education *Paideia* for Today's Emerging Adults**

In thinking about civic responsibility and its connection to education, my mind shifts to something I have pondered throughout my graduate studies—the idea of *paideia*, an ancient term with the potential for modern-day philosophical applications. The roots of paideia date back to the fifth century B.C.E. when it had "the narrow meaning of 'child rearing'" (Jaeger, 1939/1945, p. 5). However, over time the word came to be more closely associated with education and culture, *arete* (excellence), and participatory democracy and citizenship. I define paideia as a broad system of education that cultivates the general knowledge needed by all human beings to actively engage as citizens—through a 21st-century lens and within the context of American higher education, with a more specific focus on the educational and civic development of emerging adults.

The creation of a 21st-century higher education paideia requires defining both the ends and means of a college education. I believe that the end should be more than the conferral of a degree (although this too is important) and the employment outcomes that theoretically result; I assert instead that the end should be an engaged and capable citizenry. My research argues for a renewed focus on dialogue, by way of diapraxis, as one key means to this end. As has already been discussed, dialogic classroom settings are not a given in higher education. Socratic methods have fallen out of style, and models of how one participates in dialogue—not debate, diatribe, or monologue disguised as dialogue (Buber, 1947/2002)—are not easily found in the world that exists beyond the campus borders. With so much political discord, sociocultural tribalism, vitriol, and misinformation running rampant in society, the ability to converse in a respectful manner and listen to others with openness and intention—characteristics of authentic dialogue—feels critically important, if not essential, at this moment.

**FYE Programming in a 21st Century Paideia**

Pedagogical applications of diapraxis also provide an important means to the end goal of civic engagement, particularly during the first year of the college experience. Shared experiences allow us to connect with others, tap into the socialized mind of emerging adults in the 3rd order of consciousness, and provide a potential bridge for those in the 2nd order (Kegan, 1994). Shared experiences also allow us to better transition into college life and culture. One is less likely to feel "adrift" (Bruni, 2017) when they feel supported and connected to others.

Programming rooted in diapraxis can also provide ritual-like opportunities for modern-day rites of passage (van Gennep, 1960/2010) that ease the feelings of being "betwixt and between" (Turner, 1995). Low-stakes activities via diapraxis that allow for practice in pre-dialogue conversation ease the social-emotional transition of early emerging adulthood. The challenges of the first year require more support than subsequent years when the need for extra challenge is greater. Furthermore, the skills needed by adults in the modern age should include the ability to hold adult conversations and listen to others in a respectful and open manner. One cannot think critically until one is willing to hear new ideas and think beyond their own self-interest. Also, most importantly, this 21st-century world desperately needed a citizenry capable of handling future pandemics and global challenges.

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## Appendix A

## Observation Instrument (Basic Notetaking Format)

Date:

Number of students in attendance:

Topic:
Pre-class notes/observations:

| SEQUENCE OF ACTIVITIES | QUESTIONS/PROMPTS | PARTICIPANTS | OBSERVATIONS/NOTES |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Seating diagram:

Post-class reflections:

## Appendix B

### Interview Format and Initial Questions for Student-Subjects

The interview format is semi-structured. It is anticipated that a large portion of the interview will be guided by the subject, but the following questions/prompts will be incorporated.

**Initial prompt:**

- You shared a little about yourself on your questionnaire and in-class last semester, but please share a little about where you grew up, how you came to choose Ann, and your major or potential field of study.

**Class specific questions:**

- Why did you initially choose to take this FYS course last semester?
- Did the course live up to your expectations?
- By the end of the semester, did you make friends with any of your classmates?
- How would you characterize the class "culture"?
- What would you change about the course (if anything)?

**Diapraxis specific questions:**

- Did you find value in the activities I facilitated? Please be honest, all the activities were experimental in nature, and I hope to learn more from your feedback.
- Did you have any favorite activities?
- Do you think any of the activities were helpful in stimulating classroom discussion?
- Thinking broadly from your entire educational experience, do you have any favorite classroom activities that you think stimulate discussion, especially from the quiet voices in a group?

**First-year experience specific questions:**

- What was most challenging about the first semester of your first year of college?
- Did you feel sufficiently supported by the university during the first semester?
- How might the first semester be re-designed to be more helpful and supportive to students?

**Spring 2020 semester and COVID-19 specific questions:**

Say a little about this semester:

- How you felt initially?
- Are feeling now during the pandemic?
- The university's response?
- The shift to online learning?

- The move to P/F grades?
- Concerns? Regrets?

## Appendix C

### Interview Format and Initial Questions for Instructor-Subject

The interview format is semi-structured. It is anticipated that a large portion of the interview will be guided by the subject, but the following questions/prompts will be incorporated.

**Initial prompt:**

- For the record, please share a little about yourself – where you grew up; your academic history and career; how you came to Ann; how you came to teach in the FYS program.

**Class specific questions:**

- What was the inspiration for your design of this FYS course?
- What are some other FYS courses you have taught?
- How was the Fall 2019 semester class of this course different from past classes?
- How would you characterize the "culture" of last semester's group of students?
- What were the challenges you faced with this cohort of students?
- What would you change about the course were you to teach it again?

**Diapraxis specific questions:**

- Did you find value in the activities I facilitated? Please be honest, all the activities were experimental in nature, and I hope to learn more from your feedback.
- Did you have any favorite activities?
- Do you think any of the activities were helpful in stimulating classroom discussion?
- Thinking broadly from your entire educational experience, do you have any favorite classroom activities that you think stimulate discussion, especially from the quiet voices in a group?

**First-year experience specific questions:**

- What are the first-year student challenges you see facing the university this year and in the future?
- How might the first semester be re-designed to be more helpful and supportive to both students and instructors?

**Spring 2020 semester and COVID-19 specific questions:**

Say a little about 2020 and the pandemic:

- How you felt initially?
- Are feeling now during the pandemic?
- The university's response?
- The shift to online learning?
- The move to P/F grades?
- Concerns? Regrets?

## Appendix D

### Follow-up Interview Format and Initial Questions for Student-Subjects

The interview format is semi-structured. It is anticipated that a large portion of the interview will be guided by the subject, but the following questions/prompts will be incorporated.

**Initial prompt:**

Now that you have a full year and half of college behind you, I would like to ask you some questions about your overall first-year experience, the impact of the pandemic, and your thoughts looking forward. Let us start by having you share a little about what has occurred in these past few months since we last spoke.

**Questions:**

- How do you feel about your first-year experience looking back on it?
- Would you do anything differently?
- Was the experience positive or negative overall?
- How would you characterize your own personal growth as a student? As an adult?
- How did the pandemic impact your life overall?
- Do you think the university has done a good job in managing the situation?
- What did Ann not do that you think might have been helpful to students?
- How do you feel about college and adult life looking forward?