

# The value of the lecture in higher education pedagogy

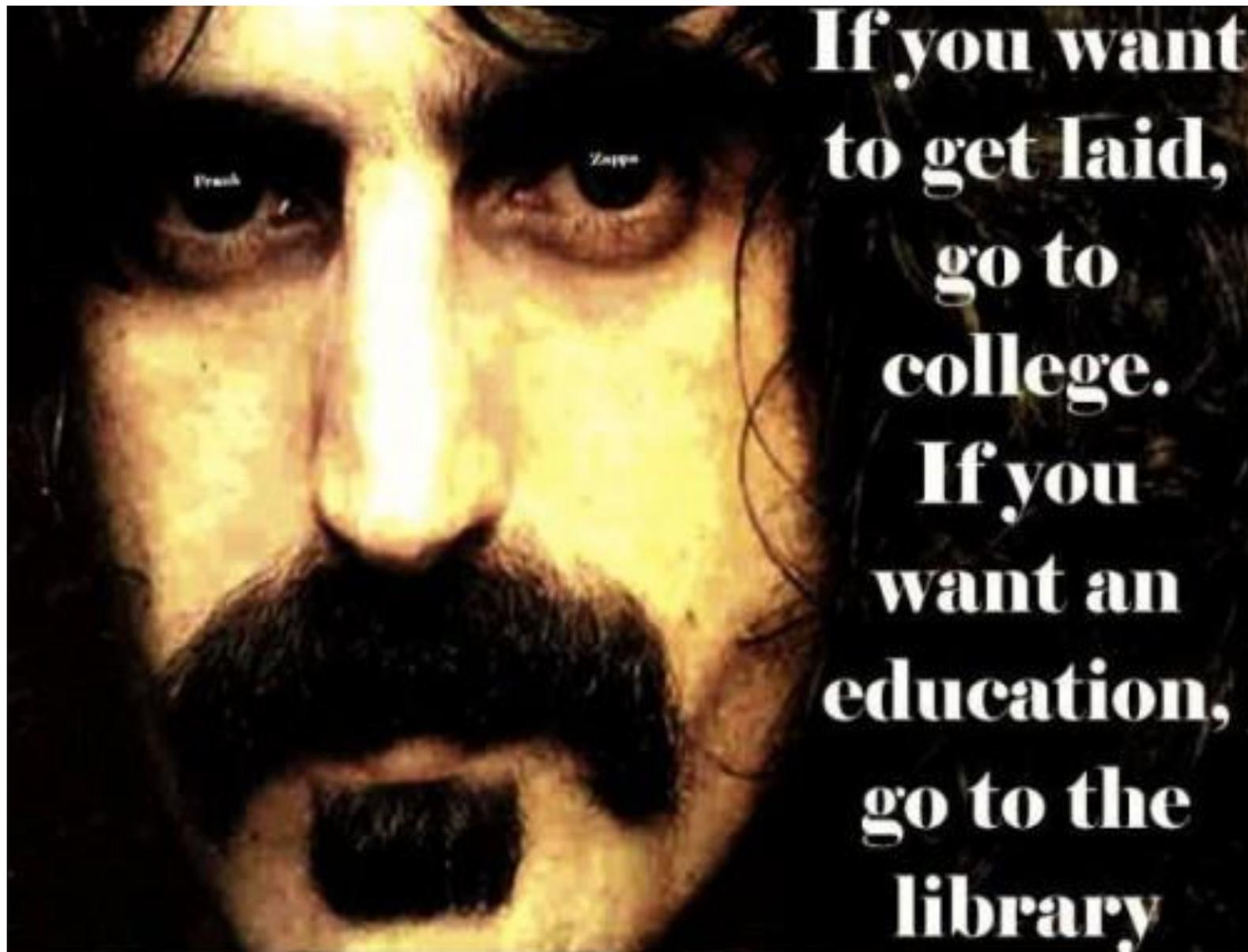
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**If you want  
to get laid,  
go to  
college.  
If you  
want an  
education,  
go to the  
library**



## SOCIOLOGIST RANDALL COLLINS

- 2004. *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- 1998. *The Sociology of Philosophies. A Global Theory of Intellectual Change*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.



## KNOWLEDGE AND PHYSICAL INTERACTION

Collins (1998, p. 25):

“... after the printing revolution (around 1000 CE in Sung dynasty China; by 1450 in Europe), it should have been increasingly the case that intellectuals carry out their activities without ever meeting each other. There is no such trend ... .. the basic form of intellectual communities has remained much the same for over two thousand years: key intellectuals cluster in groups in the 1900s CE, much as in the 400s BCE.”



## INTERACTION RITUALS

- Group of people physically assembled
- Focus attention on same object or action
- Share a common mood or emotion



“... the teacher cannot express herself with as much strength, skill and inspiration to an audience of one as she can to a group. The reason for this is simple but profound: it is only by addressing the group that the teacher is forced, as it were, to be attentive to everyone and no one in particular. The teacher talks to a group of students and, in doing so, speaks to each one individually; she speaks to no one in particular and thus to everyone. A purely individual relationship is not possible, or is constantly interrupted, and the teacher is obliged to speak and act publicly.”

Masschelein, J., & Simons, M. (2013). *In Defence of the School. A Public Issue*. (J. McMartin, Trans.). Leuven: Education, Culture & Society Publishers.



## KNOWLEDGE AND PHYSICAL INTERACTION

- “The discussion, the lecture, the argument.... these are the concrete activities from which intellectual activities arise..... although lectures, discussions, conferences, and other real-time gatherings would seem superfluous in a world of texts, *it is exactly the face-to-face structures which are the most constant across the entire history of intellectual life*” (Collins 1998, p. 25).



## THE VALUE OF A LECTURE

- “... *key* intellectual event is a lecture or a formal debate, a period of time when an individual holds the floor to deliver a sustained argument on a particular topic.” (Collins 1998, p. 26)
- A lecture is a “peculiar kind of speech act: the carrying out of a situation—transcending dialogue, linking past and future texts. A deep-seated consciousness of this common activity is what links intellectuals together as a ritual community” (Collins 1998, p. 28).



## THE UNIQUE ROLE OF A LECTURE

- First: an expert provides synthesis and overview of a key topic, which focuses attention on the analytic cutting edge, or key concepts of a particular area.
- Second: an intellectual (or budding intellectual) community is gathered, the group's attention is focused on a symbolic object. Sharing a physical space, and sharing a focus on an object, is what builds energy and excitement, what charges up an idea.



## CAN THIS BE ACHIEVED IN LARGE CLASSES?

- Sufficient numbers of students need to follow and be excited by the key ideas.
- The less education individuals have, and the more divergent the educational experiences are within the group, the less plausible it is.
- If it is difficult for the lecturer to gauge the interest, involvement, and the degree to which students are following her talk, and even more difficult for her to do anything about it, because modifying it would still mean boring some or losing others, the class is too big.



## SUMMARY

- We cannot just offer less and less to more and more learners.
- Contact between lecturers and students is necessary for the acquisition of bodies of conceptual knowledge.
- Tried and tested does not always mean conservative and old-fashioned.....

