Proseminar in Curriculum, Teaching, and Educational Policy

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Seminar: Tuesdays, 4 - 7 p.m., Rooms 109 and 111, Erickson Hall
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Purposes of the course

This course is the first of two proseminar courses required of all entering students in the doctoral program in Curriculum, Teaching, and Educational Policy. The course is intended to provide a foundation for an array of questions, ways of framing and pursuing issues, and tools that you will draw on in the rest of your work. Focusing on several key dimensions of schools and schooling, our aim is to help you develop new understandings of the role and nature of schools and teaching, as well as to construct alternative perspectives on and approaches to examining educational issues. While material draws heavily from the U.S. educational experience and provides one context for our work, we will also pursue particular themes and questions in the educational systems of other nations, and contrast the past with the current wave of critique and reform.

The course is about learning about particular themes and struggles common to public education, in the past and the present, in the U.S. and in other countries. But it is also a course in learning to think, analyze, argue, and write -- about teaching and learning, about schools and society, about teachers, students, and the public -- with both imagination and discipline. Because we think of doctoral study as learning to participate in new communities of discourse, we focus explicitly on methods and forms of thought and expression -- particularly methods of interpretation, analysis, and argument, as well as approaches to reading and forms of writing -- that are part of what you will be learning throughout the program.

The course also serves as an opportunity for you to begin to build and participate in an intellectual community with others entering the doctoral program. The nature of the work in this course will involve interpreting and analyzing texts and other materials, framing and revising questions, making conjectures, and testing alternative assertions. All this involves taking new intellectual risks; developing a culture in which taking such risks is valued, encouraged, and supported is part of our collective task.

Course themes

In this course, we will explore three inter-related areas of educational thought and practice that shaped the drive to provide mass public schooling, and the consequent struggles faced in educating a diverse population: the purposes of education, the consequent manifestations or internal effects of competing purposes on knowledge, learning, teaching, and structure, and finally the relationship between society and education. To begin with, we will pretend that the areas are independent and that we might be able to talk about them with little reference to one another, but will begin gradually to investigate their interdependencies and connections.

Our investigations will involve us in examining teaching and learning, focusing on issues such
as the nature of modal teaching practice, the curriculum; the experience of different groups in schools and what students learn; criticisms of school, efforts to improve schools, and the consequences of such efforts. The following themes are central to our investigations. We hope that you will leave this semester with new insights and questions related to each of these themes.

*Outsider and insider perspectives*

One orienting theme will draw competing portraits of the educational setting. We will attempt to differentiate between two complex and to some degree unsatisfactory but revealing perspectives: one represented by many outsiders (members of the larger public who have tended to view the schools through the lens of rational policymaking, who have expressed themselves through laws, campaigns, speeches, scholarship, and research); the other perspective represented by participants and keen observers, insiders, in the educational enterprise (teachers, scholars, and of course the students themselves). Our intent is that we will alternate these perspectives each week. One week we will examine outsider perspectives on an issue, the next week we will look at the same issue from an insider’s perspective.

*Conflicting visions of schools and their purpose*  

One theme we will explore is the perennial tension about the aims of schooling. In the U.S., for example, from the time of the common school era, Americans have expected much of schools. And since then, purposes and aims have multiplied, accompanied by more and more critique. Strategically, we will consider multiple criticisms of schooling and the visions of reform they spawn. Examining such waves of criticism and reform, we want to probe what reformers explicitly promote for the improvement of education. And, because, in times of ferment, multiple critiques and visions of reform co-exist, we will try to uncover the conflicts and connections within the discourse about schools and schooling in different cultural contexts.

*Who is in the conversation, who is out, and whom are they talking about?*  

Another theme for our investigations concerns the actors and targets of reform visions. Who critiques schools, who lobbies for what kinds of change, and whose voices are heard and why? We notice, for example, that educational discourse about other people’s children differs from discourse about one’s own. We also note that the participants in debates about education change over time. Who is talking? Who is being talked about? These differences in “who” across the waves of critique and reform are important in uncovering shifts in the conversation about the improvement of schooling. In making comparisons of the different visions that reformers advanced, we want to look closely at how who the actors are, and on whom they focus, affects the dynamic of the reform and its consequences.

*The interconnectedness of dimensions of schooling*  

Although analysis of particular dimensions of schooling can be illuminating, a fourth theme in our investigations of reform is the interconnectedness of those dimensions. Isolating any one dimension leads to misrepresentation and oversimplification; we need to keep the relationships complex. Views of learning are embedded within images of teaching; the formal curriculum reflects the surrounding political context. Larger societal issues shape the emergence of particular reform ideas, and the content of textbooks is shaped by notions about whom the students are and what they need to learn. As we pursue questions about teachers, teaching, content, learning, students, purposes of schooling, and the contexts in which these are discussed, we want to look for relationships among these dimensions that will offer clues to understanding schools and those who seek to shape or change them.
Another theme in our inquiry is to look beyond the obvious outcomes of the reform. As reformers seek to change the processes and outcomes of schooling for particular students, it is reasonable to ask about the extent to which their dreams are realized. However, we are also concerned with what happens in the wake of efforts to make change. What unforeseen consequences emerge that shape subsequent problems, critiques, and reform efforts? What happens that reformers did not intend, and why? Does anyone seem to notice these unintended consequences, and, if so, what do they do about it? To what extent do solutions aggravate the problems they were intended to remedy? To what extent do they create new problems?

**Skepticism about change**

Finally, we want to cultivate a skeptical stance toward the question of change. How can we distinguish between superficial change and change that affects deep patterns and assumptions? Are the views of knowledge that undergirded the curriculum of the nineteenth century different from those reflected in the current reform movement? Have the purposes of schooling changed? Who teaches and who goes to school does seem to have changed: Has the relationship between teachers and students changed? When we think we see deeper change, we want to try to distinguish fundamental shifts from accumulations and additions. Do we sometimes see changes along one dimension — views of what is worth knowing in a particular area — without accompanying changes in related dimensions — views of learning or knowing? We should not underestimate continuity in practice and in the discourse about that practice; we also want to be on the lookout for what really appears to have changed over time. A final theme in our work will be to look critically at efforts to effect change, at evidence of change and continuity, and at claims about the success — and value — of change.

**Course organization**

Instead of talking about focal themes, another way to explain the course involves focusing on the structure of the syllabus and the way that we — as a collective — will organize ourselves to do the work. As we already mentioned, the course has three parts: the purposes of education; the consequent manifestations or internal effects of competing purposes on knowledge, learning, teaching, and structure; and the relationship between society and education. We will spend approximately three weeks examining questions of purpose, after which time we will spend about 9 weeks on effects so that we can closely examine issues of knowledge, learning, teaching, and organizational structure. We will conclude the class by spending two classes considering the relationship between schooling and society.

As a class, we will move back and forth between working in smaller sections and as a large group. When we meet as a whole group, we will meet in 111 Erickson. We have assigned everyone to one of two sections, one led by Michael, the other by Suzanne. Michael’s group will meet in 111EH, Suzanne’s in 109 EH. The section leader will take primary responsibility for reading and responding to your work, and the meetings of the smaller sections are intended to provide everyone with more opportunity to talk. We will announce each week whether the entire cohort will meet the following week, or individual sections.

**The work of the class: Inquiry through reading, discussion, and writing**

Yet a third way to talk about the course involves attending to the actual work entailed. This course involves inquiring into educational issues in three ways: reading, discussing, and writing. We explain our assumptions and expectations about each of these below.

**Reading**
We will be reading a wide variety of texts this semester. Some are primary source materials gathered from other places and times; others are secondary or interpretive commentaries written from different standpoints. The work we will be doing depends on reading interactively, on bringing both collective and individual goals to the act of reading, considering, and reconsidering our texts. In its most straightforward expression, this involves bringing questions to think about while preparing to read something, reading a text, and reflexively placing what one has read in the context of both evolving scholarship bearing on a subject and one's own development as a scholar. Below we pose several sets of general questions for all of us to bring to our reading, questions that we and our colleagues have found effective.

- What is the author trying to say?
  What are the author's principal and subsidiary arguments or theses? What are the important conceptual terms? What do the author's assumptions seem to be? What sorts of evidence and methods are used? Can you identify specific passages that support your interpretation? Are there other passages that either contradict or appear less consistent with your understanding? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the author's argument? Can you make sense of, or account for, these differences?

- How has the author constructed the text?
  What clues can you get from the work's structure? Does the organization give you insights into the argument? Are there patterns in the author's presentation that help you to locate and understand the most valuable material? What can you do to concentrate your attention and interrogation of the text?

- What is the author's purpose?
  Who was the author? Why was this work written? To whom was the author speaking and why? What can you know or infer about the author's motivation? What seem to be the context for the work's origination? Can you dissect its politics? How does the work's purpose seem to affect the author's selection of questions, methods, or interpretation? Was the author trying to confront a body of scholarship with a new interpretation based on new methodologies, or new evidence? Was the work intended to persuade a segment of the public to change its mind or to act on something it already believed?

- What are your purposes in reading this?
  Different purposes have different requirements: should you skim the piece, acquire mastery or fluency, use it as a source of examples or illustrations?

- How do the author's assumptions and ideas fit with your own understanding?
  How might your response to the work be affected by values, beliefs, and commitments that you think that you share with the author? Can you read and make sense of the work on its own terms, not just that it confirms your existing thinking or values? Can you consider all of the work, rather than just those passages that you agree with, or which you can label "good," or dismiss as "bad?" Can you approach it with a spirit of discovery and let the story be told in its own right? Can you notice what seems strange or surprising, and accept its offerings as opportunities for discussion?

- How do the author's arguments fit within various communities of discourse?
  How is a piece of work connected to the efforts of others dedicated to similar purposes? In what community or communities does the author locate him or herself? How can you tell? How might an author's work connect with your own understanding of the work of others, and of your own evolving work on an issue or topic?

It is essential that you read all of the required texts for each class meeting.
Discussion
Because the course will be run as a seminar, your participation in discussions is important not only for your own learning but also the learning of others. What you learn in this course will be influenced by the degree of everyone’s engagement in and contributions to these discussions. Preparing the readings and coming to class with questions, insights, and issues is crucial to making the course work. A learning community like this one relies on the contributions and participation of all its members. Building the culture of the class so that genuine inquiry is possible will take all of our efforts. We want to make the seminar a context, in which in which people listen and are listened to, in which evidence matters, in which thoughtful questioning of one another’s claims is desirable, and in which alternative perspectives and interpretations are valued.

Writing
Writing is an important vehicle for exploring and clarifying ideas, for trying out interpretations and arguments, and for representing ideas and communicating with others. Writing plays a central role in doctoral work, and in educational scholarship. For some students, the amount of writing in the doctoral program is completely new. You may never been asked to do much writing, not in school and not in any position you have held. The writing you are asked to do may therefore be unfamiliar, and perhaps even make you feel anxious. For other students, writing is commonplace. You may feel comfortable with writing and write a lot. You may have been told you are a good writer, and you may find writing easy and enjoyable. However, whether you have done much writing or little, whether you feel yourself to be a good writer or not, the writing we are trying to help you learn to do is different from writing you have done in other school and non-school contexts. It may be helpful to keep in mind that you are now expanding, not replacing, your writing style and skill. You are learning to participate in a community of educational scholars who have a specialized discourse, of which writing is an important part. Because we want the proseminar to provide you with occasions to focus on and develop these new aspects of your writing, we have structured the assignments to provide guidance and resources, as well as the opportunity for comments and suggestions. While we may occasionally ask you to do some journal writing, most of the writing you do in this course will involve three papers.

Paper 1. For the first paper, we will focus the topic and question about which you will examine and then write. Doing this will engage all class members in working on a common issue. We do this for several reasons. First, we recognize that the kinds of questions, analysis, and argument that academic scholarship requires are new for students in the proseminar. By framing the first paper ourselves, we hope to bind the task and to provide guidance for the kind of analysis and writing you will be learning. The task will be more focused and less ambiguous. Second, posing a common issue for the entire class gives us the opportunity to underscore some particularly important themes in the course. Finally, by asking you to work on a common topic, we present the opportunity for you to consult with colleagues and to exchange ideas as you pursue your analysis and writing.

We will distribute the assignment for the first paper on October 13 and it will be due on October 20, 1998. During the intervening week you can confer with one another, discussing the issues involved and alternative ways of arguing about them.

Paper 2. For the second paper, we will ask you to find an historical artifact from schooling from at least the turn of the century. The artifact might be a piece of curriculum, a student test, or another remnant of schooling. We will also ask that you identify an analogous contemporary artifact. You can choose to find these artifacts in small groups, pairing up with someone with similar interests, say, in language arts or social studies instruction. The second part of the course – the segment in which this assignment is nested – is intended to help you explore issues of knowledge, teaching, and learning in schools. The readings we are doing – ranging from
classroom bargains to theories of constructivist learning to adventurous teaching – highlight complexities about assumptions we collectively or individually hold about the nature of teaching and learning, the respective roles of teachers and students, and the nature of school knowledge.

Much like the first paper, the second paper requires an analysis/synthesis of readings. This time the focus of that analysis will be a contrast between an artifact of schooling from 50 years ago (or more) and a contemporary artifact of schooling. Artifacts could include curricula (worksheets, textbooks, scope and sequence), pictures or drawings of schools, policy documents, commission reports, school evaluations, teacher tests, and the like. Make sure to pick two documents that parallel one another (i.e., are about the same topic or issue).

One helpful tool for thinking about a piece of scholarly work is to phrase the work in the following way: “The purpose of this study is to describe and explain . . . .” The purpose of this investigation is to describe and explain the similarities and differences in the assumptions (implicit or explicit) about teaching, learning, and knowledge present in to artifacts of schooling.

The final paper for this project should include a discussion of the following:

1. Description of the artifacts:

   Remember that your readers will not know much about the artifacts to which you are referring. So part of your analysis should include a description of the relevant features and contexts of your artifacts. Note too that simply showing the reader the two artifacts will not help, for we all see different things when presented with an event. You will need to guide your readers’ viewing of the artifacts. Relevant questions you might want to consider include (for each of the two artifacts):
   - Where did the artifact come from?
   - Who is the author?
   - What was the intellectual/political/practical purpose or context of the production of this artifact?

2. Answers to the following questions, as appropriate:
   - What assumptions about school knowledge are present?
   - What assumptions about teachers’ work and/or roles are present?
   - What assumptions about students’ work and/or roles are present?
   - What assumptions about the nature of learning are present?
   - What assumptions about the organization of educational experiences are present?

3. A cross case comparison that examines changes (or lack thereof) over time.

4. An explanation of those changes based on the relevant literature.

Papers should use standard citations and should be approximately 5-8 double spaced pages in length. You may choose to work on this inquiry with one or two partners, but the paper you turn in should be your own work. This paper will be due on November 24, 1998.

Paper 3. For the third paper, we will ask you to investigate a current educational reform effort. The intention of the third assignment is to afford everyone the opportunity to use some of the material we have covered this term to examine and explain a contemporary debate about the reform of schooling. Start by determining a current reform you are interested in understanding:
For example, if you were interested in bilingual education and put "bilingual education" into Yahoo's search engine, you would find links to a special issue of Ed Week, the Michigan Association for Bilingual Ed, the national association, the NY association, etc. If you looked up the state resources page, you would find a link to California which would then lead you to articles for and against Prop 227 (English for the Children) and legislative analyses of that proposition. Similarly for mathematics education: You would find the home page for NCTM, the home page for groups criticizing trends in mathematics education (like Mathematically Correct at http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/mathman/index.htm).

Note: If you are interested in a reform that you cannot locate information about on the web, you will have to change your focus. The topic of this paper requires that you acquired some information through the web.

After you have located a topic and been able to locate resources that help you understand opinions and perspectives on either side of the debate, you will be ready to think about this final assignment. You are welcome to search out other resources for this assignment including newspaper and journal articles not on the web, books, policy documents, etc. These should be seen as supplements, though, for the most important resources are those you find on the web.

The pieces of the final assignment should include:

First, define / describe reform that you are interested in.
Second, describe the range of opinions around the issue that you were able to locate on the web and through other means. Note: You are not required to describe all of the relevant perspectives on your reform, but you are required to array a range of perspectives (minimum: 2).
Third, you will then be asked to explain why these debates make sense given the readings that we have done this term. Note: You need not include ALL of the readings. Instead, be selective and use the readings that best inform (either through affirmation or contradiction) your argument.
Fourth, you should write a methodological appendix (no longer than 4 double spaced pages) in which you discuss how you located the information in your paper and how you made decisions about truth, legitimacy, validity, and reliability of the data you used for this assignment.

This paper will be due on December 15, 1998. While this is the last paper due in the class, work on this paper will begin relatively early in the term since it will require field work and group meetings.

Please note: The writing you do for this course is to be your own work; standard practices for citation and attribution are expected. Additionally, the writing should be work produced solely and specifically for this course.

To help you with your writing, we have also assigned a text, The Craft of Research, by Wayne Booth and his colleagues. While not intended to be a primer for how to construct a scholarly argument, the authors of this text nevertheless offer significant insights into scholarly work. We will expect you to read this text throughout the course, and we will refer to it often with reference to your writing assignments.
Course requirements and evaluation

Your grade for this course will be based on the following distribution:

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<td>Class participation</td>
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<td>Paper 1</td>
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Course Outline

Note: a packet of required readings is available at the Budget Printing Center, 972 Trowbridge Rd., East Lansing, 351.5060. The required books are available at the MSU Bookstore in the International Center next door to Erickson Hall.

Week 1 (1 September 1998): Introduction.
How can different kinds of source material provide clues about teaching, learning, and schooling? What hypotheses are supported by available evidence? What questions do they expose or suggest? What is not visible?

I. Purposes

Weeks 2 and 3 (8 and 15 September 1998): Public purposes.

Required reading.


Massachusetts school law of 1647.

Treaty with the Indians of the Six Nations (1744).

When reading something, it is important to pay attention to the terms that the author(s) is using and how those terms are defined. It is also important to search out the argument: What overarching argument is the author making here? Labaree’s piece is thick, and bears reading several times. You will need to first understand the different purposes of schooling he nominates, and then also the overarching argument he makes about those purposes.

But once you’ve got those under your belt, the work has just started, for David’s argument is a complex one. In class we will expect that you’ve got a handle on his terminology and his overall argument. Please think about the sources of these various purposes: Where do they come from? Also think about their manifestations in schools. Each of you brings a wealth of experience that you can use here. What forms and expressions have these various purposes taken in your own lives? (This might include things that you have wanted for your own children, things that other parents have said, school board mandates, public policies, etc.) We then want to talk in class about the interactions between and among the various purposes of schooling that David discusses.
The Cohen and Neufeld piece is equally important and thick. Please be sure to look for the central terms and the overarching argument that David and Barbara make in that piece. One way to read the article is that it is an argument about how and under what conditions schools change. Look through the piece. How does David and Barbara think that schools change? What are the forces that change them and why? How?

As we mentioned in class, the Horace Mann piece is a masterful piece of persuasion. Although we haven't discussed the historical context in which this piece was authored, here's a sketch: Mann wrote this piece on the eve of the advent of universal, public, tax-supported schooling in the U.S. Mann believed in that kind of schooling and wanted it to happen. So read the piece with this question in mind: As the U.S. was moving toward a universal education, what did Mann think needed to be done? And what do you think he saw his role in that as? The other pieces are very short and intended to help you see something about the multiple purposes of schooling.

**Week 3-4 (15 and 22 September 1998): Private purposes: What it meant to become educated.**

What was it like to be a young person -- in different communities, within different cultural and ethnic groups and different classes -- during the first part of this century in the U.S.? What seems to have been the meaning and value of education for different communities and families? What were their aspirations in life? How did schooling fit with those aspirations?

**Educating Rita.** Film to be screened at 7:30-9:00 Wednesday, September 9, 1998, in 111 Erickson.

**Required reading:**


For session 3, we will spend the first hour in our separate sections. Michael and I will work with those two groups to examine the Cohen and Neufeld piece. In particular, we'll start by looking at their vocabulary and their argument (what is it). Then we'll work on the question we posed to you in last week: How could this be read as an argument for the way in which things change? We will then look at the Mann piece. We'd like to hear what you have to say about what Mann is doing and what Mann appears to think his role is/might be in school reform. "What does he think needs to be done?" "Where does he see himself in all of that?"

Then we will ask the whole class to think and look across the Labaree, Cohen and Neufeld, and Mann work. These pieces help us think about the purposes of schooling. Recall, too, that Michael pointed out that those purposes have roots in people's values and, as he put it, "aspirations." We would like to think across the three pieces, both about what they teach us about various people's purposes of education and about the roots of those beliefs. What are their interactions? How are they compatible? In what ways are they contradictory?
Choice of one novel, autobiography, or biography:


For Session 4, we will examine Rita, the novel or memoir that you pick, and the collective class readings. These readings are intended to help provide more intimate and personal views of schooling, teaching, learning, knowledge. We will start by considering the question: What do these various portraits (the movie, the novels, the memoirs, the class readings) reveal about individuals' and their aspirations for education, their views on teaching and learning and schooling? (Recall that we want you to switch between insider and outsider views on the issues we study... This will be an insider week.) After discussing what these pieces reveal, we will move to a related issue: "How does reading these more intimate and "insider" portraits of schooling, etc. mutually enrich our reading of the more formal and abstract studies of schooling (think here, for now, of Labaree and Cohen and Neufeld)? What happens when we move back and forth between these different views on many of the same issues?

II. Effects and Manifestations

Week 5 (29 September 1998): A formal view of school knowledge and curriculum.

Required reading:


The piece for this week's discussion is a chapter from a larger book entitled *The Shopping Mall High School*. The chapter is called "Origins" and it was written by David Cohen. It is, in some ways, one of the more elegant and condensed histories of American education and the comprehensive high school that you will ever read. Some context: In the mid-1980s, there was a wave of reform -- some people now call it the "first wave" of contemporary school reform -- that we are still experiencing (standards-based reforms are, for example, part of a subsequent wave). During this first wave of reform, some reformers defined the problems of the American high school in the following way: "There had been a Golden Age for the American high school when standards and achievement were high, when students learned things that mattered. But now -- in the 1980s, remember -- that Golden Age had eroded. So to fix the American high school, we need to return to its Golden Age."
Using this conceptualization of the "problem," the answer for reformers was simple: Go find out what they did in the Golden Age and make that happen again. Other scholars were less certain of this argument and wondered whether there had ever been a Golden Age. If there hadn't been, then clearly the problem facing the American high school and its reform would have to be reconceptualized.

David Cohen wrote this essay in the midst of this line of thinking. We would like you to read it and come to class prepared to discuss the following questions: "What does David Cohen think about the claim that there was a Golden Age for the American high school and that, if only we return to what we used to do, we can fix the contemporary problems facing U. S. high schools? What evidence does Cohen bring to bear on making his argument?"

Week 6 (6 October 1998): A classroom perspective on curriculum.

Required reading.


Next week's reading involves two chapters from a book written by Philip Cusick (a professor here at MSU in educational administration) called The Egalitarian Ideal. The chapters are about teaching and learning across three case studies of high schools in Michigan. Cusick was one of the first scholars in U.S. education to do field work, and his interests have long been in understanding what happens inside of schools and why. We are going to use his chapters for an "inside view" week, this time inside the American high school. We begin with an important premise: "Finally, there is one more important assumption--that the participants described are reasonable men and women, an honest, hard-working and well-intentioned lot who do what they do for good reasons. On their own terms, their actions make sense. The goal is to understand the educational world as they understand it, their roles as they play them, and the system as their combined efforts create it"(Cusick, 1992).

With that in mind, we ask you to do the following: Read the chapters with this assumption in mind. Consider the following questions: Who are the various actors and what roles are they playing? How are those roles mutually reinforcing? Why does this make sense? What picture of education is drawn here? How does this picture of inside schools add to our sense of American education, what it is, and the forces (historical, institutional, psychological, practical) that shape it?


Required reading.


Our discussion will concern two readings. One from Dewey — The Child and the Curriculum, the other from Bruner, The Process of Education. A little background. Dewey. As you might recall, Kathy nominated Dewey as an alternative “noble ideal” in the history of U. S. education. This Dewey reading is one of the clearest conceptualizations Dewey put forth early on. This was written before Dewey saw what happened to his ideas. If you are a novice Dewey reader, here’s something to keep in mind: Dewey often starts his arguments by suggesting a juxtaposition of terms or a dichotomization of terms. The child and the curriculum, school and society, experience and education. His arguments start by describing how people think of these terms as separate (in some cases oppositional). But Dewey often is trying to convince the reader that the two terms can be seen as one unified concept. His argument, for instance, in this week’s reading is for the child AND the curriculum as a view on education rather than the child OR the curriculum.

Bruner. Recall Michael’s comment a couple of weeks ago about how ideals keep popping up in the history of U. S. education. One way to read Bruner is to think of it as Dewey re-visited. After Sputnik was launched, the U.S. went into a lizzy about the state of our educational system. We had to get more students better educated (especially in math and science) if we were going to beat the Russians in the space race (in fact, in all races -- economic, political, intellectual, etc.). In the wake of post-Sputnik, mathematicians and scientists got very interested in curricular reform, and Bruner was a critical character in curriculum reform at that time. There was a conference at Wood’s Hole of interested parties (social scientists, scientists, mathematicians, psychologists) and the Bruner piece you will read is his argument about a view of education that emerged from that conference. Your charge is to read the Bruner and come prepared to discuss his argument about curriculum.

In class we will spend some time working on each view separately -- what is Dewey’s curricular vision? and Bruner’s? -- and then move to contrasting the cases: Are they the same view? Are there significant differences? What might account for those differences and/or similarities?


Required reading.


Now we’ll be looking at a more contemporary debate about education. Of the many things that we could examine, one involves thinking about how people do/could/should learn. Dewey had an argument about this, as did Bruner. Contemporary constructivists have an argument about this, as do critics of current educational efforts. Even when people are not directly talking about theories of learning, their comments sometimes include implicit assumptions about the nature of school learning.

Read everything with an eye and ear toward theories of learning. As you read all of the pieces try and build a picture of constructivism or some related theory of learning And try and build a picture of an alternative to constructivism (maybe something more like absorption, perhaps something more passive). Look at the readings and try and discern what assumptions each author makes about the nature of learning. Remember, if someone is criticizing one view of learning, they are probably also telling you something about an alternative view of learning. For example, if Bruner says that learning science must involve the doing of science he is also telling you that simple absorption of factual knowledge does not lead to complex or powerful knowledge of science.

Come to class with two “pictures” or models of learning, one more about constructing knowledge, one more passive. And be able to locate all of the readings that illuminate each picture or model.


Required reading.


The two readings for week address the same question: “What explains the persistence of traditional teaching in schools?” Larry Cuban, a long time social studies teacher, then superintendent, now professor of education at Stanford wrote How Teachers Taught as a historical analysis (using a lot of iconographic materials) to try and offer an explanation that accounted for the persistence of certain teaching practices. David Cohen, in "Plus ca change,” addresses the same question. For those of you who do not know the referent of his title, there is a French saying “Plus ca change, plus c’est la meme chose” (the more things change, the more they stay the same). Cohen’s argument for the persistence of traditional teaching is a different kind of argument than Cuban’s. The two authors use different evidence, sometimes different terms.

On the matter of Cuban. There are two editions of this book (the second is called Second Edition, copyright 1993). The format of the books is quite different, so we want to be sure that everyone reads the same sections. In the second edition, please read the Introduction; any two of chapters 2,3, and 4 (these are three case studies and we would like you to pick two of them to read). Also read chapter 6 – “Informal education” -- and chapter 8 – “Explaining how they taught.” the first edition is structured differently, so PLEASE contact Michael if you have the first edition (copyright 1984). Come to class prepared to talk about the following questions: What is Cohen’s argument? What is Cuban’s argument? What concepts and evidence does each author use? (In particular, what do you think of the kinds of evidence that Cuban uses in his text?)
For the last hour of class, we will discuss the following: Look back to Hirsch and examine his argument concerning Dewey. In particular, examine Hirsch’s claims about the dominance of progressive ideas about education, teaching, and learning in U.S. schools. Then look at Cuban and Cohen. How might one use Cuban and Cohen’s arguments to respond to Hirsch’s claims?

Week 10 (3 November 1998): Teaching: Views from the classroom.

Required reading.


There are many things that shape the interactions of students and teachers in classrooms. Some of those forces are internal to the classroom -- relationships between individuals, assumptions about knowledge or teaching or learning or student roles, etc. Some of those forces are external to the classroom -- contextual factors related to the school or to the community in which the classroom is nested. Each of the readings illuminates something about a variety of forces that shape the interaction of teachers and students. The forces illuminated vary from piece to piece, but each offers a unique portrait of schooling from the inside.

Read each piece with the following question in mind: How does this reading shed light on the forces that shape what happens inside of a classroom? You might even want to make a list or draw a picture of the range of forces, and note which readings help you understand which forces. In class, we will do the following: First we will watch a video segment from 48 Hours about a teacher and his history class. Then we will have a whole group discussion about the forces seem to be shaping his practice and how the readings for this week illuminate our viewing of the video.

Since no one video clip could illustrate all of the forces that shape instruction, we also invite you each to bring a story from your own experience, a poem, a short story, a passage from another kind of literature, or a description of a scene from a movie or a play that illustrates some of the forces described in the readings. We will start with the video clip, discuss that and then move to other instances that you bring to class.

Required reading.


These two readings are articles by recent graduates. Tim Lensmire was a teacher interested in writing who went off to teach writers workshop in a local school only to discover that it was more complicated than he thought. Sarah Theule Lubienski worked on an innovative curriculum project with Glenda Lappan (current president of NCTM) and decided to see what kids learned when she taught an innovative mathematics curriculum in a local school. Both Tim and Sarah wrote lovely dissertations and these articles represent some of their thinking.

Both articles raise questions about contemporary efforts to reform teaching so that it looks more like "teaching for understanding/meaning" than traditional teaching. In class, we will view a videotape that displays an image of reform-minded teaching (either of mathematics or of language arts/literacy). We'll then have a discussion of your reactions to that video given the readings.

Week 12 (17 November 1998): The educational system.

Required reading.


We're moving from video to live performance this week. Instead of watching a video and talking, we've invited Philip Cusick to come to class. Philip has agreed to speak for a little while about two issues related to his book: (1) what he was trying to do methodologically and (2) what he has been doing since to test and stretch his thinking. After Philip talks for a while, we'll open the floor for a general discussion and he will stay until break (he will be with us from about 4 through 5:30).

After the break, we will continue the discussion about Philip's analysis and the Gamoran and Secada piece as a large group, in sections, or in smaller groups. In preparation: read the front (chapter 1) and back (chapters 8 and 9) of Philip's book very carefully. Skim the intervening chapters (chapters 2-7, note that he writes nice summaries at the end of all of the chapters). Read the other paper carefully. Think about this question: What are these authors' (Cusick, Gamoran, and Secada) claims about the educational system and how it works?
Week 13 (24 November 1998): Organizational patterns and differential access to knowledge.

Required reading.


For the first hour and a half, we'll consider the following question: How do you reconcile Chubb and Moe's enthusiasm for market with the following readings: a. Oakes' analysis of the effects of tracking? b. Anyon's analysis of the relationship between knowledge and opportunities to learn in school? c. Cusick's analysis of the bargaining that goes on in schools? d. Labaree's analysis of the costs of market forces re: learning?

After the break we will reconvene as a large group and consider the following: Clearly, Cusick was worried about the tendency to push responsibility up the system, and he was explicit about distrusting that as a strategy for school reform. And Michael talked some about how -- from a libertarian perspective -- the important role of the state in education was related to protecting a learner's need to make the decision about who to be and what to know (even when parents want to have control over that). So . . . we would like you to think about the readings and come prepared for the last hour of discussion to talk about how you would answer the following question: "What might be a possible role of the state/government in American education?"

III. Outcomes

Week 14 (1 December 1998): Theories of school and society.

Required reading.


In the last two weeks of the class, we intend to dip into theories of education and its role in society more generally. This visit to theory is not meant to give you in-depth knowledge of the role of theory in educational scholarship, but rather to give you a brief introduction. A word or two about the theories that we'll be visiting. The theories we'll be examining are part of a stream of discourse in social science more generally. Like all important theories, these theories evolve over time as people work on them and test them in the real world. As one theory collapses, another theory is proposed to offer better explanations.
One theory that we'll see evidence for is human capital theory which experienced its heyday in the 1960s. Some would say that human capital theory was one of the greatest American exports, one of the first theoretical positions scholars took in the U.S. to argue for a way of thinking about society and investment in individuals and collectives that might win the hearts and minds of the undecided in battles with communism and other threats to freedom. According to human capital theory, schools play an important role in society that can be significant and positive. Many people worked on ideas of human capital theory, and as part of the larger theoretical discussion, other theories were offered, including social reproduction. Social reproduction theory was the anti-version of human capital theory, anti-institution and radical, with theorists arguing that collectivities and individuals are harmed, not helped, by the mechanisms that make society run. And, because schools are part of that social fabric, schools have a powerful -- but not positive role -- in society. Social reproduction peaked in the late 1970s.

Since the late 1970s, theoretical discussions have continued, and there have been considerable changes in theorizing about the nature of society and schools' roles in that society. Next week (not this) we will look at more recent scholarship. However, anyone who wants to understand the current theoretical debates needs to know something of his or her history. The three pieces we are reading this week are significant "moments" in these debates and represent relatively clear arguments about these positions.

So, what we will do . . . . We'll meet as a large group, split into six small groups -- two on Todaro, two on Schultz, two on Bowles and Gintis. Each group will have 45 minutes to answer the following questions: What is the theory of schools and their role in society that is offered here? What is the meaning of going to school according to this theoretical perspective? What effect does schooling have individually and collectively? You might also want to think about how the other readings in the class lead you to agree with the argument or lead you to question/challenge it. However, in the small group it will be most important not to react to the argument but to be able to describe the argument. Come to class prepared to be assigned to any of the three authors. Please be sure to do all of the reading.


Required reading.


Chunk one. For the first hour and a half, we'll talk about the lads and Willis's argument, so be sure to do the reading and recall that you only have to read the ethnography. In preparation for class, consider the following question: "Why do the lads construct a counter school culture?" When you think you have the answer to that question, consider the next question: "What is Willis's argument?" Be sure to think about both co-construction and resistance as you decide what Willis's overarching argument is. Also think about other experiences you have had as a teacher, parent, or student that serve to illustrate Willis's argument (you can also bring examples from other course readings that fit the argument as well). After we've talked about those two questions, we'll ask one more: "What is the difference between Willis's argument and that of Bowles and Gintis?"