TE 920 -- Social Analysis of Educational Policy
Spring 2007

Thursdays, 4:10 – 7:00 p.m.
218 Bessey Hall

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Course Description

The purpose of TE 920 is to consider some of the ways in which educational researchers and policymakers have identified, examined and sought to address fundamental issues and problems of K-12 public education in the United States. The course readings come from a variety of disciplines including sociology, anthropology, political science, and public policy. Many of the policy problems that we will study in the course revolve around how schools can best educate students from low-income, racial minority groups that traditionally have been poorly served by public schools.

The course is based on the following premises: a) educational policy is an instrument for potentially improving the provision of educational services; and b) educational policy plays a significant role in shaping how we perceive social and educational problems, how we assign social identities, and how social power and resources get established and distributed.

In the course, we will critically examine research and policy documents in order to address the following set of questions:

1. How are definitions of educational problems constructed?
2. Who benefits and who loses from these definitions?
3. In what ways do various groups benefit from these definitions? In what ways are they penalized by them?

In examining how definitions of educational problems affect different groups, we will also consider the following set of questions:

1. What are the ways in which and the extent to which various policies and reforms have been implemented?
2. What effects have these policies and reforms had on teachers and students, particularly in schools serving high percentages of minority, low-income youth?
3. What other outcomes are associated with these policies and reforms?

The course addresses several concepts and theoretical frameworks that have influenced research, policy, and/or practice in education and related fields. These concepts/frameworks include the cultural-ecological framework (Ogbu), cultural capital (Bourdieu), social capital (Coleman), and program coherence (Newmann). The course will also examine several policy ideas and reforms including Title I, school restructuring, multicultural education, standards-based reform, and high-stakes testing.
Throughout the course, we will consider a) how researchers have drawn on or modified these concepts/ frameworks in examining educational issues and problems and b) the ways in which and extent to which various policies address/are likely to address the ideas underlying these concepts/frameworks as well as related research findings.
Working Assumptions for the Course

1. **We will respect one another.** Our beliefs, values, and ideas often differ from one another because we draw from different life experiences. In this class, we will discuss, question, and challenge ideas, but we need to be careful not to attack individuals or to create an unsafe, unproductive space.

2. **We will challenge our own beliefs, values, and ideas.** We need to be open to challenging our own prejudices, assumptions, and interpretations. We also need to expect to discuss things we often do not discuss in public, but still feel strongly about. It is alright to feel uncomfortable when we do so.

3. **We are here for a positive educational experience.** Please ask questions, share your thoughts, and make this class meaningful for yourself.

Course Assignments

Critical Analysis Papers: These are 3-page papers in which you briefly summarize an author’s argument and how she supports it and then develop an original thesis in relation to the author’s main point(s). You are required to turn in two critical analysis papers during the semester and they should be turned in by Thursday at 12:00 noon (on the same day that the reading in question is assigned). These will count as 20% of your course grade.

Policy Document Analysis/Presentation: You will be required to work with two other students to analyze a policy document. This will involve writing a 5-page analysis of the document and making a presentation to the class based on your analysis. “Policy documents” include a) formal written federal, state, district, school, department and/or classroom statements of particular policies; b) excerpts from government hearings about policies; c) press releases; d) speeches; e) news reports; f) research briefs; and/or g) videos. You will present the document to our class and facilitate an activity or discussion that engages the class in critically examining the policy in light of the ideas/ frameworks offered in course readings. The presentation and paper combined will count as 30% of your course grade.

Final Paper: The final paper will be an analysis of a policy in which you use one theoretical concept or framework from the course. You can examine any aspect of the policy that most interests you. This includes research on the process of policy formation, policy implementation, policy outcomes, or historical analyses. An overview and plan for this paper will be due in mid-March. The final paper is due in early-May. You will have a chance to discuss these papers with other students in the class in April. The final paper will count as 40% of your course grade.

Attendance/Class Participation: You will be expected to be present and prepared to participate in class each week. If an extenuating circumstance prevents you from attending class, you should notify Prof. Youngs by phone or e-mail and communicate with him and another student about what happened in the class you missed. Attendance and class participation will count as 10% of your course grade.

Note: We wish to fully include persons with disabilities in this course. Please let us know if you need any accommodations in the curriculum, instruction, or assessments to enable you to fully participate.

Readings

The following books are required readings for the course. You can purchase them from the MSU Bookstore, or buy them on-line. A good website to compare prices is www.bestbookbuys.com.

Course Schedule

Jan. 11 – Course Introduction and Overview

Discussion of participants’ backgrounds and interests  
Review of syllabus, objectives of course  
Suggestions for analyzing research arguments and policy documents

Jan. 18 – Sociological Research/Social Construction of Educational Policy and Policy Analysis


Jan. 25 – Social Isolation and Economic Deprivation


Recommended:


Feb. 1 – Social Isolation and Economic Deprivation/Title I


Feb. 8 – Cultural-Ecological Framework/Variability in School Engagement


**Feb. 15 – Cultural Capital**


Recommended:


**Feb. 22 – Cultural Capital/Research on Family-School Relationships**


**March 1 – Cultural Capital/Research on Detracking (School Restructuring)**


Recommended:


**March 8  No Class – Spring Break**

**March 15 – Cultural Capital and Multicultural Education; Introduction to Social Capital**

Recommended:


**March 22 – Cultural Capital and High Stakes Testing; Social Networks**


Recommended:


**March 29 – Social Trust**


**April 5 – Social Trust**


**April 12 – AERA**

No class meeting

**April 19 – Program Coherence/School Capacity**


Reading to be Assigned
April 26 – Research on Induction/New Teachers’ Social Networks


Reading to be Assigned

May 3 – Final Papers Are Due