TE 920 — Social Analysis of Educational Policy
Spring 2010

Thursdays, 4:10 – 7:00 p.m.
107 Erickson Hall

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Course Description

The purpose of TE 920 is to consider some of the ways in which educational researchers and policy makers 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, 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 examine research and policy documents in order to address the following questions:

1. How do various policies and reforms construct definitions of educational problems?
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?

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 cultural capital (Bourdieu), social capital (Coleman), relational trust (Bryk and Schneider), teacher professional community, instructional program coherence (Newmann), and sensemaking (Weick).

The course will also examine several policy ideas and reforms including multicultural education, high-stakes testing, school restructuring, local school councils, professional development, and mathematics and literacy reforms.

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

Attendance/Class Participation: You are expected to be present and prepared to participate in class each week. If an extenuating circumstance prevents you from attending class, you should notify me by phone or e-mail and communicate with myself and another student about what happened in the class you missed. Attendance and class participation will count as 10% of your course grade. Note! The 10% is not automatic. If you come to class and do not participate on a regular basis, do not expect to receive the full 10%.

Class Facilitation. Each student is expected to co-lead (with 2 other students) the class’s examination of one class reading. This will consist of the following: introducing key topics and issues to the class and leading a discussion centered on questions intended to highlight themes from the reading. Every group is responsible for turning in a typed outline (from their respective reading) that indicates themes, probing questions, and methods designed to engage colleagues. You are encouraged to use creative classroom activities to highlight themes and ideas about the readings. However, your creativity should not overshadow the essence of the readings. I strongly encourage you to think creatively about how to carry out these activities. Class facilitation will constitute 10% of the grade for the course.

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 (2) 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 15% 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 March. The final paper is due in early-May. The final paper will count as 35% of your course grade.
Note: I 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.
Evaluation

Rubrics will be used to assess written assignments according to the following criteria: consistency with the assignment; development and organization of the argument; clarity of written expression; and use of sources/resources. You will receive the rubrics in class well before the assignments are due.

Class participation will be evaluated on the following criteria: thoughtfulness of contributions (including questions), respectful consideration of and response to others’ comments/questions, and demonstrated mastery of the reading.

The assessment of your class facilitation will be based on the comprehensiveness of your presentation, its clarity, and your efforts to invoke student participation when you co-lead the class discussion.

Grades will based on the following:

Attendance and Participation 10%
Co-leading Discussion (one reading) 10%
Critical Analysis Papers 15%
Policy Document Analysis 30%
Final Paper 35%

Grade Distribution

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>93-100</td>
<td>4.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>77-84</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>85-92</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>69-76</td>
<td>2.5</td>
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Readings

The following book is required reading for the course. You can purchase it from the MSU Bookstore, or buy it online. A good website to compare prices is www.bestbookbuys.com.


We will read two chapters each from the following books. You are not required to purchase them for the course. The chapters will be handed out in class/included in the coursepack.


Other course readings will be available in the 5th floor copy center in Erickson Hall (hard copies and CDs) and online as URL links.

Course Schedule

Jan. 14 – 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. 21 – Sociological Research/Cultural Capital


Jan. 28 – Cultural Capital/Multicultural Education/High-Stakes Testing


Further reading:


Feb. 4 – Cultural Capital/Research on Family-School Relationships


Further reading:


Feb. 11 – Cultural Capital/Research on Detracking (Restructuring)/Teacher Labor Markets

Further reading:


**Feb. 18 – Introduction to Social Capital**


**Feb. 25 – Students’ Social Networks**


Further reading:


**March 4 – Teachers’ Social Networks**


Further reading:


**March 11 No Class – Spring Break**

**March 18 – Student Presentations**

**March 25 – Relational Trust**


April 1 – Relational Trust


April 8 – Teacher Professional Community/Restructuring


Further reading:


April 15 – Teacher Professional Community and Instructional Program Coherence


April 22 – Teachers’ Sensemaking


April 29 – Student Presentations

May 6 – Final Papers Are Due