

Culture and Learning: Applying Social Sciences within Education

SOCS 607
Fall 2016



Course Description

In recent years, education at all levels globally has been experiencing several paradigm shifts. Increasingly, educational institutions and policies reflect a Western approach, representing a “sea change” in both the way students learn and educators teach. Closer to home, programs such as No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, and “common core” have engendered heated debate about their efficacy and consequences as policymakers and administrators demand performance-related data in a time of dramatic budget challenges. In addition, school districts and communities often struggle to address rising levels of ethnic, economic, social, religious, and linguistic diversity. In short – as this course explores – the fundamental culture of education is shifting at a pace and in ways not seen before, presenting challenges and opportunities for professional educators and students. At its heart, we will consider applied applications of these elements that might influence practice and policy at several levels, including the classroom, school, district, community, state, and nation.

This course will employ anthropology as the primary lens through which to examine these topics, though other social science perspectives, including sociology, geography, economics, and related disciplines, will be introduced and are welcome. **No prior experience in anthropology or other fields is required or assumed.** In fact, this course benefits from having students with a rich array of backgrounds participate.

Required Texts

Spindler, George D. (ed.) (1997) *Education and Cultural Process: Anthropological Approaches*. Waveland Press.

Levinson, Bradley A.U., et al. (eds.) (2000) *Schooling the Social Animal: Social and Cultural Dimensions of Education*. Rowman and Littlefield.

Lareau, Annette. (2011) *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*. University of California Press.

Instructor

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Course Requirements

Readings

Many course readings will come from the two edited volumes (Spindler and Levinson et al.), though others will be journal articles or various sources available through the course website. In addition, we will read one monograph that touches on many course themes. You will write a short (3-5 page) review/critique of the book.

Online Discussion Activities

You will be expected to participate each week with forum posts or other interactive activities related to that week's readings and other course content.

Website

You will contribute to a section of the course website that focuses on an appropriate education-related topic that will demonstrate your mastery of course themes. The idea of the site is to select a topic that appeals to you and examine it in greater depth through the critical lenses we employ throughout the semester. Possible topics include – but are not limited to – early childhood education, adult and lifelong learning, “code shifting,” homeschooling, a particular case study or policy, an examination of the educational system in a different country, and many others. You should focus on more than just “telling a story” and provide your own recommendations for transforming what you learned into practice.

Presentation

In addition to your website section, you will deliver a presentation to the class on your topic. The goal is to present for about 15 minutes, with time for questions and discussion after.

Participation

The structure of this course demands active and engaged learning, which translates in part to consistent participation. You are expected to attend all online and in-person sessions, contribute to discussions, and offer your own insights and questions. **Learning is not a spectator sport.**

Grading		Assessment Methods
Book Review / Critique	10%	In an effort to provide clear and fair grades, as well as guidance for you while completing assignments, certain elements of this course will be assessed using rubrics. Rubrics assign a scale of point values (e.g., 1-3 or 1-5) to sets of criteria of various aspects of an assignment, such as the content of a particular section or overall grammar. Some graded elements, such as participation, are by their nature more qualitative and are left to my discretion.
Online Discussion Activities	20%	
Topic Proposal	10%	
Website	20%	
Presentation	20%	
Participation	20%	

Course Schedule

This schedule is not set in stone and may change depending on a number of factors. The authoritative list of weekly readings and assignment due dates will always be on the course Moodle.

Week	Topic	Readings	Assignment
1 (9/13 Online)	Introduction		
2 (9/24 Campus)	What is "culture"?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Culture is Ordinary" (Ch. 2 Levinson) • "The Fax, the Jazz Player, and the Self-storyteller: How do People Organize Culture" (Ch. 24 Levinson) • "Theory, Research, and Application in Educational Anthropology" (Ch. 1 Spindler) 	
3 (9/26-30)	Culture and Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Educational Anthropology: Early History and Educationist Contributors" (Ch. 2 Spindler) • "Ethnography: An Anthropological View" (Ch. 3 Spindler) • "Culture and Learning" (Nieto) 	
4 (10/4 Online)	Cultural Differences and Explanations of School Failure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "What No Bedtime Story Means: Narrative Skills at Home and School" (Ch. 13 Levinson) • "Understanding Cultural Diversity and Learning" (Ch. 14 Levinson) • "Reconsidering Anthropological Explanations of Ethnic School Failure" (Foley) • "Achieving School Failure" (Ch. 7 Spindler) 	Topic Proposal
5 (10/10-14)	Social Reproduction and Inequality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Social Reproduction in Classrooms and Schools" (Collins) • "Bordieu on Education and Social and Cultural Reproduction" (Nash) • "Why Segregation Matters: Poverty and Educational Inequality" (Orfield and Lee) • "The Black-White 'Achievement Gap' as a Perennial Challenge of Urban Science Education: A Sociocultural and Historical Overview with Implications for Research and Practice" (Obed et al.) 	
6 (10/17-21)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Class and Gender Dynamics in a Ruling-Class School" (Ch. 20 Levinson) • "'Not Girly, Not Sexy, Not Glamorous': Primary School Girls' and Parents' Constructions of Science Aspirations" (Archer et al.) • "Photovoice: Understanding High School Females' Conceptions of Mathematics and Learning Mathematics" (Harkness and Stallworth) 	
7 (10/29 Campus)	Discussion of <i>Unequal Childhoods</i>		Review / Critique paper

Week	Topic	Readings	Assignment
8 (10/31-11/4)	Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “It’s Not the Culture of Poverty, It’s the Poverty of Culture: The Problem with Teacher Education” (Ladson-Billing) • “The Teacher as an Enemy” (Ch. 5 Spindler) • “Beth Anne: A Case Study of Culturally Defined Adjustment and Teacher Perceptions” (Ch. 12 Spindler) 	
9 (11/8 Online)	Identity and Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “‘Those Loud Black Girls’: (Black) Women, Silence, and Gender ‘Passing’ in the Academy” (Fordham) • “‘I Don’t Want to Hear That!’: Legitimizing Whiteness through Silence in Schools” (Castagno) • “Dissin’ ‘the Standard’: Ebonics and Guerilla Warfare at Capital High” (Fordham) 	
10 (11/14-18)	Policies, High-Stakes Testing, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Cultural Politics of the Texas Educational Reform Agenda: Examining Who Gets What, When, and How” (Salinas) • “High-Stakes Accountability, Minority Youth, and Ethnography: Assessing the Multiple Effects” (Sloan) • “Creating Classroom Cultures: One Teacher, Two Lessons, and a High-Stakes Test (Valli and Chambliss) 	
12 (11/21-25)	Thanksgiving Break		
13 (11/29 Online)	International and Cross-Cultural Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Day Care Teachers and Children in the United States and Japan: Ethnography, Reflexive Interviewing and Cultural Dialogue” (Ch. 20 Spindler) • “Habitus and Cultural Identity: Home School Relationships in Rural France” (Ch. 16 Levinson) 	
14 (12/10 Campus)	Final Presentations and Wrap-Up		

Course Readings

Archer, Louise et al. (2013) “‘Not Girly, Not Sexy, Not Glamorous’: Primary School Girls’ and Parents’ Constructions of Science Aspirations”. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society* 21(1):171-194.

Castagno, Angelina E. (2008) “‘I Don’t Want to Hear That!’: Legitimizing Whiteness through Silence in Schools”. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 39(3):314-333.

Collins, James (2009) "Social Reproduction in Classrooms and Schools". *Annual Review of Anthropology* 38:33-48.

Foley, Douglas E. (1991) "Reconsidering Anthropological Explanations of Ethnic School Failure". *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 22(1):60-86.

Fordham, Signithia (1993) "'Those Loud Black Girls': (Black) Women, Silence, and Gender 'Passing' in the Academy". *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 24(1):3-32.

Fordham, Signithia (1999) "Dissin' 'the Standard': Ebonics and Guerrilla Warfare at Capital High". *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 30(3):272-293.

Harkness, Shelly Sheats and James Stallworth (2013) "Photovoice: Understanding High School Females' Conceptions of Mathematics and Learning Mathematics". *Educational Studies in Mathematics* 84(3):329-347.

Ladson-Billings, Gloria (2006) "It's Not the Culture of Poverty, It's the Poverty of Culture: The Problem with Teacher Education". *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 37(2):104-109.

Nash, Roy (1990) "Bourdieu on Education and Social and Cultural Reproduction". *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 11(4):431-447.

Nieto, Sonia (1999) "Culture and Learning". In *The Light in Their Eyes*, pp. 47-71. New York: Teachers College Press.

Obed, Norman et al. (2001) "The Black-White 'Achievement Gap' as a Perennial Challenge of Urban Science Education: A Sociocultural and Historical Overview with Implications for Research and Practice". *Journal of Research in Science Teaching* 38(10):1101-1114.

Orfield, Gary and Chungmei Lee (2005) "Why Segregation Matters: Poverty and Educational Inequality". Electronic document, <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED489186.pdf>.

Salinas, Cinthina S. (2007) "The Cultural Politics of the Texas Educational Reform Agenda: Examining Who Gets What, When, and How". *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 38(1): 42-56.

Sloan, Kris (2007) "High-Stakes Accountability, Minority Youth, and Ethnography: Assessing the Multiple Effects". *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 38(1):24-41.

Valli, Linda and Marilyn Chambliss (2007) "Creating Classroom Cultures: One Teacher, Two Lessons, and a High-Stakes Test" *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 38(1):57-75.

Students with Disabilities

It is the policy of Wesleyan University to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. Students, however, are responsible for registering with Disabilities Services, in addition to making requests known to me in a timely manner. If you require accommodations in this class, please contact me as soon as possible, so that appropriate arrangements can be made. The procedures for registering with Disabilities Services can be found at <http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/disabilities/index.html>.

Technology in the Classroom

Technology is ever-present in our lives, and we have come to depend on devices to a great extent. That said, please mute or set to vibrate any devices. Also, while I understand that many people prefer to take notes on computers, iPads, tablets, etc., I do not expect that to be a large requirement in this course. Regardless, using Facebook, texting, playing solitaire, and so forth will not be tolerated, and I reserve the right to ban any devices in the class should they prove disruptive.

Syllabus Policy

This syllabus is a guide, not a contract. I reserve the right to alter aspects of it as necessary, including adding/removing readings or assignments, adjusting weights of grades, and so forth. The online Moodle will always have the most up-to-date information, and any announcements will be made through that site.

Attendance

While I do not take formal attendance, failure to attend will negatively affect your participation grade. **Two absences not cleared in advance or due to a documented emergency will result in complete loss of participation points.** Absences will necessarily result in a significant loss of content that cannot be made up.