

Education 207X/History 258D
School – What Is It Good For?
Winter 2013
Tuesday, 2:15 to 5:05 pm
3-4 Units; Pigott Hall (Bldg 260), Room 012

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Office hours: by appointment

Course Description

This course will seek to answer the question in its title: School – What Is It Good For? Unlike the song from the 70s that inspired the course’s title (“War – What Is It Good For?”), the answer to this question is not necessarily “absolutely nothing,” although that will remain a distinct possibility throughout the quarter. In practice, the course will focus on a series of books and a few articles in which authors try to establish claims about the particular purposes, functions, impacts, and social roles of schooling – especially in relation to American society. The class draws in part from the issues that frame my book, *Someone Has to Fail: The Zero-Sum Game of Public Schooling*.

The course addresses two broad domains of interest to education students:

- It explores the big questions that underlie Educational Policy.
- It explores a wide range of approaches to Educational Theory.

Americans have a long history of pinning their hopes on education as the way to realize compelling social ideals and solve challenging social problems. We want schools to promote civic virtue, economic productivity, and social mobility; to alleviate inequalities in race, class, and gender; to improve health, reduce crime, and protect the environment. So we assign these social missions to schools, and educators gamely accept responsibility for carrying them out. When the school system inevitably fall far short of these goals, we initiate a wave of school reform to realign the institution with its social goals and ramp up its effectiveness in attaining them. In this class, we explore the social mixed aims and mixed outcomes of America’s puzzling, estimable, gargantuan, and ineffectual system of public education.

At its heart, this is a story grounded in paradox. Schooling is perhaps the greatest institutional success in American history. It grew from a modest and marginal position in the 18th century to the very center of American life in the 21st, where it consumes an enormous share of the time and treasure of both government and citizenry. Key to its institutional success has been its ability to embrace and embody the social goals that have been imposed upon it. Yet, in spite of continually recurring efforts, schooling in the U.S. has been remarkably unsuccessful at realizing these goals in the social outcomes of education. In spite of everything, however, we keep pushing new tasks onto our schools, less as a rational investment in achieving social results more than as a matter of faith. The readings in this course explore the kinds of goals, ideals, problem-solving roles, and visions of the good society that we have imposed on schooling over

the years. They also explore the extent to which schools have been able to realize these aims, and if not, what kinds of effects they have exerted on American life.

Consider the following Policy Visions of what schools should do and Educational Theories about what they can and can't do, with course readings that will explore each of these issues:

- Produce citizens for a democracy: Gutmann
- Create human capital and promote economic growth: Goldin & Katz, McKinsey, Kristof
- Teach core values in American society: Dreeben
- Reproduce an unequal social structure: Bowles & Gintis
- Serve the interests of educational consumers: Collins
- Promote social mobility and social equality: Boudon, Hertz, Goldin & Katz, Kristof
- Promote disciplinary power: Foucault
- Teach core values within a religious community: Peshkin
- Promote a mix of social access and individual advantage: Labaree

Eligibility

This class is open to doctoral students, master's students, and undergraduates. All students who enroll in the class must take it for a letter grade.

Course Requirements

The Importance of Critical Reading: You need to do more than read the required texts in this class; you need to read them critically. See the section at the end of the syllabus, "Guidelines for Critical Reading."

The Importance of Analytical Writing: The entire grade for this course depends on the quality of each student's work on the written assignments that are defined below. (While I strongly encourage students to participate in discussions in class, this participation is not graded.) One central purpose of the course is to encourage students to develop their skill at producing effective analytical writing. This skill is essential for anyone who wishes to be successful in meeting the requirements of academic study and who expects to have an impact in the intellectual and professional world of education. This course (like any course) is a good place to work on enhancing your abilities as a writer. See the section at the end, "Reference Books on Research, Writing, and Making Arguments," in which I recommend four reference books that can be helpful to students in working on problems of writing, thinking, and carrying out research in education.

Assignments

Format for Submitting Papers: Please submit all papers by email. Papers should be Word documents, single-spaced and left justified. Label reaction papers with your last name and the due date, e.g., Labaree 3-06-12. Label final paper or final exam with your last name and either Final Paper or Final Exam.

Critical Reaction Papers (50%): Write four short reaction papers dealing with the assigned readings for a particular week. In each of these papers you should provide a brief critical response to some significant issue encountered in the book or other assigned readings for a particular week. You are not being asked to summarize the argument of individual readings, although your discussion should reveal that you have understood what this argument is. Instead you should react to the reading(s) as a critical observer with a specific frame of reference (derived from the course, from your reading elsewhere, and/or from your own experience). You don't need to respond to a whole book or the whole array of readings for a particular week, although you do need to focus on something that cuts across two or more articles or chapters. Pick one major issue from the reading that grabs your attention and briefly develop it. (A focused discussion of one issue works better in a short paper like this than an effort to cover a number of different issues.) Feel free to make connections with other things you know, but be sure that you draw on the reading from that week for a substantial part of your evidence or ideas or examples. It's perfectly ok, even desirable, for you to draw on your own experience with schools, as long as you use this experience as a case in point in an analytical argument that is related to the reading. Also keep in mind that these short papers can be more informal in style and structure than the final paper in the course, which should adhere more closely to academic norms for analytical writing. You will be evaluated on the basis of the thoughtfulness, depth of understanding, and analytical insight that is reflected in your paper. These papers should be approximately three pages in length double-spaced (900 words). They can run longer, if you wish, but this is not necessary or even necessarily desirable. Reaction papers should be turned in no later than 2:15 p.m. on Tuesday of the week that the particular reading(s) are assigned. Late papers will earn a reduced grade (e.g., a B+ will become a B). All papers in this class must be submitted by e-mail. Save your paper as an MS Word document and send it to me as an e-mail attachment. I will be using Word's "tracking changes" function to record comments in the text. We will send papers back to you as e-mail attachments. If you turn in more than four papers, I will count the four with the highest grades.

I have two aims in asking you to write these reaction papers. First, they will encourage you to keep up with the reading and to come to class with some already-formulated thoughts about the issues for that week. You should come to every class with a set of questions and comments and thoughts about the issues that you developed while doing the week's readings, and you should be prepared to draw on these insights selectively in a constructive effort to help shape discussion in class. The critical reaction papers help facilitate this kind of preparation and thereby help promote an informed and broad-based discussion of the issues in class each week. (As I mentioned earlier, participation in such discussions is encouraged but not graded.) Second, these short papers will provide you, at the end of the term, with a set of elaborated notes on course issues and readings that should serve as a useful resource when you write your final paper, when you encounter related issues in your future work, or when you want to revisit some of the readings at a later point. You may want to use these papers to write a running commentary

on the issues in the course, with your individual papers building on each other from week to week. You may want to try out ideas in these papers that you will later develop in the final paper for the course. Also, you may want to use these papers as a way to hold an ongoing conversation with us about readings, schools, and history. Whatever you do in each of these papers, however, you should make sure that in some substantial way you are making a response to a significant aspect of the reading.

Final Paper (50%): You have two options for doing a final paper for this course: 1) write a take-home final exam essay in response to questions that I provide; or 2) write a paper on any topic related to this course (as long as your section instructor gives advance approval for this topic). I explain these options below. Whichever option you pick, you should review carefully the “Guidelines for Analytical Writing” near the end of this syllabus. All take-home final exams and final papers must be submitted to me by e-mail no later than 5 pm on Monday, March 19. Late papers will receive a reduced grade (e.g., a B+ will turn into a B).

1) **Take-Home Final Exam:** On Tuesday, February 22, I will hand out a list of 3 or 4 final exam questions. These questions will ask you to analyze broad issues in the course by drawing on required readings. Pick one of these questions and write a persuasive analytical essay in response. Be sure to follow the “Guidelines for Analytical Writing,” which are found in a section at the end of this syllabus. These essays should be a minimum of 3,600 words. They are due no later than 5 pm on Monday, March 18. Please send them to me as an e-mail attachment. Late papers will receive a reduced grade.

2) **Final Paper:** If you choose option 2, write a paper on an issue loosely related to this course. (See below for details about the content of this paper.) These papers should be a minimum of 4,500 words. Basically, any topic that you and your section instructor agree on will be acceptable for this assignment. A one-page proposal for this paper is due on January 29. If you turn in a draft by March 5, you will be permitted to revise the paper (after receiving my comments) and submit it for re-evaluation. The final version of the paper is due no later than 5 pm on Monday, March 18. Please send your proposal and paper to me by the appropriate deadline as an e-mail attachment. Late papers will receive a reduced grade.

You should be thinking about how you can use the paper to advance your own intellectual and professional agenda. What are you interested in exploring in your program? What issues brought you here in the first place? What kinds of issues will you be exploring in your honor’s thesis, master’s thesis, qualifying paper, or doctoral dissertation? How can you configure this paper as an opportunity to examine some part of this larger agenda, in a way that will move you along intellectually and professionally? We’re open to anything that is productive for you and that is loosely related to this course. If you get the permission of both instructors, you can combine this paper with one you are writing in another course and produce a single larger paper that meets both course requirements.

Consider some of the following options for framing a final paper in this course:

1. Write a paper on any issue related to the subject of the course. The only constraint is that we need to approve your topic. We can negotiate the details of purpose, focus, sources, audience, and so on. Feel free to use this paper as a way to develop your thinking about any course-relevant issue that interests you, to follow up on earlier work you have done in other classes, to carry out a pilot empirical study, to reflect on teaching or research work you have done, or to try out ideas (or analyze data) that you might want to explore later in a dissertation.

2. Write a proposal for a research study related to the issues in the course. You are not expected to carry out this study during this quarter but only to frame the issues, define a workable and worthy research question, and spell out the process of data gathering you will go through in order to answer it. This proposal could be for a pilot study for a study leading to a thesis or dissertation. Advanced doctoral students can use this paper as an early version of their dissertation proposal for a topic related to reform.

3. Write an paper exploring one of the issues in the course empirically using data you will collect (or have already collected) or using primary historical sources.

4. Write a review essay on some issue related to the issues in the course, using two or three books -- from the course reading list or elsewhere -- as the basis for the review. In what ways are these books helpful in developing a useful understanding of this issue? What can you learn about this issue by comparing and contrasting the approaches taken by these authors? What are the implications of the authors' analyses for the issue you have selected? Examine a number of examples of review essays before proceeding. Note that a review essay is not just a long book review. Instead, this is a genre which combines a review of several books with an essay about some of the key issues raised by the books but developed further by the essayist. The books provide a platform from which you can launch your own interpretation, synthesis, analysis, political program, and/or theoretical ruminations. However you are still held by the usual rhetorical norms: you need to persuade the reader of your credibility through careful argumentation, effective use of sources and evidence, and artful political-moral-emotional appeals. In such an essay you need to draw on appropriate sources outside the books that are the starting point of the review.

5. Write a synthesis paper -- an analytical essay in which you pull together ideas that emerged this course. At minimum, this essay should draw upon at least two sets of readings assigned in the course. The point is to integrate your thinking about an issue that cuts across readings and perspectives, drawing upon authors read in the course (and other authors you have encountered elsewhere) along with your own professional experience.

Readings

Assigned Books: We will read the following eight books. Bowles & Gintis, Collins, and Dreeben are not in print and are available on Blackboard (*); the rest have been ordered at the Stanford Bookstore. All eight books are also on reserve at Cubberley Library.

- Gutmann, Amy. (1987). *Democratic education*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Goldin, Claudia & Katz, Lawrence F. (2008). *The race between education and technology*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- *Dreeben, Robert. (1968). *On what is learned in school*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- *Bowles, Samuel & Gintis, Herbert. (1976). *Schooling in capitalist America*. New York: Basic Books.
- *Collins, Randall. (1979). *The credential society: An historical sociology of education and stratification*. New York: Academic Press.
- Foucault, Michel. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (trans. by Alan Sheridan). New York: Pantheon.
- Peshkin, Alan. (1986). *God's choice*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Labaree, David F. (2010). *Someone has to fail: The zero-sum game of public schooling*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- * = not in print; available on Blackboard

Assigned Articles: We will also read a small number of articles and book chapters, which will be available to students on Blackboard.

Course Outline

* = available on ED 207X Blackboard site.

1) 1/8: Introduction to Course

- * Labaree, David F. (2010). What schools can't do. *Zeitschrift für Pädagogische Historiographie*, 16:1, 12-18.
- *McKinsey & Company. (2009). *The economic impact of the achievement gap in American schools*.
http://www.mckinsey.com/App_Media/Images/Page_Images/Offices/SocialSector/PDF/achievement_gap_report.pdf.
- *Kristof, Nicholas. (2009). Democrats and Schools. *New York Times*, October 15.

2) 1/15: Schools Promote Citizenship

- Gutmann, Amy. (1987). *Democratic education*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Labaree, David F. (2010). Chapter 2 – Founding the American school system. In *Someone has to fail: The zero-sum game of public schooling*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

3) 1/22: Schools Promote Human Capital Production

- Goldin, Claudia & Katz, Lawrence F. (2008). *The race between education and technology*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Labaree, David F. (2010). Chapter 7 – The limits of school learning. In *Someone has to fail: The zero-sum game of public schooling*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

4) 1/29: Schools Teach Core Values of Society

*Dreeben, Robert. (1968). *On what is learned in school*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
 Labaree, David F. (2010). Chapter 1 – From citizens to consumers: A history of reform goals. In *Someone has to fail: The zero-sum game of public schooling*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Turn in proposal for final paper (unless you plan to do the take-home exam)

5) 2/5: Schools Promote the Reproduction of an Unequal Social Structure

*Bowles, Samuel & Gintis, Herbert. (1976). *Schooling in capitalist America*. New York: Basic Books.

Labaree, David F. (2010). Chapter 3 – The progressive effort to reshape the school system. In *Someone has to fail: The zero-sum game of public schooling*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Labaree, David F. (Forthcoming 2013). Schooling in the United States: Historical analysis. In Denis C. Phillips (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Educational Theory and Philosophy*. New York: Sage Publications.

2/12: No class this week

6) 2/19: Schools Promote the Positional Interests of Educational Consumers

*Collins, Randall. (1979). *The credential society: An historical sociology of education and stratification*. New York: Academic Press.

Labaree, David F. (2010). Chapter 8 – Living with the school syndrome. In *Someone has to fail: The zero-sum game of public schooling*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

7) 2/26: Schools Promote Social Mobility and Social Equality

* Boudon, Raymond. (1986). Education, mobility, and sociological theory. In John G. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 261-274). New York: Greenwood.

*Hertz, Tom. (2006). *Understanding mobility in America*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.

Labaree, David F. (2010). Chapter 6 – Failing to solve social problems. In *Someone has to fail: The zero-sum game of public schooling*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
 Take-home final exam questions distributed.

8) 3/5: Schools Promote Disciplinary Power

Foucault, Michel. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (trans. by Alan Sheridan). New York: Pantheon.

Labaree, David F. (2010). Chapter 5 – Classroom resistance to school reform. In *Someone has to fail: The zero-sum game of public schooling*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Turn in final paper draft for comment.

9) 3/12: Schools Teach Core Values of a Religious Community

Peshkin, Alan. (1986). *God's choice*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

3/18: Turn in final papers and take-home exams.

Guidelines for Critical Reading

As a critical reader of a particular text (a book, article, speech, proposal), you need to use the following questions as a framework to guide you as you read:

1. What's the point? This is the analysis issue: what is the author's angle?
2. Who says? This is the validity issue: On what (data, literature) are the claims based?
3. What's new? This is the value-added issue: What does the author contribute that we don't already know?
4. Who cares? This is the significance issue, the most important issue of all, the one that subsumes all the others: Is this work worth doing? Is the text worth reading? Does it contribute something important?

If this is the way critical readers are going to approach a text, then as an analytical writer you need to guide readers toward the desired answers to each of these questions.

Guidelines for Analytical Writing

In writing papers for this (or any) course, keep in mind the following points. They apply in particular to the final paper or take-home exam for this class. Many of the same concerns apply to critical reaction papers as well, but these short papers can be more informal than the final paper.

1. Pick an important issue: Make sure that your analysis meets the "so what" test. Why should anyone care about this topic, anyway? Pick an issue or issues that matters and that you really care about.
2. Keep focused: Don't lose track of the point you are trying to make and make sure the reader knows where you are heading and why.
3. Aim for clarity: Don't assume that the reader knows what you're talking about; it's your job to make your points clearly. In part this means keeping focused and avoiding distracting clutter. But in part it means that you need to make more than elliptical references to concepts and sources or to professional experience. When referring to readings (from the course or elsewhere), explain who said what and why this point is pertinent to the issue at hand. When drawing on your own experiences or observations, set the context so the reader can understand what you mean. Proceed as though you were writing for an educated person who is neither a member of this class nor a professional colleague, someone who has not read the material you are referring to.
4. Provide analysis: A good paper is more than a catalogue of facts, concepts, experiences, or references; it is more than a description of the content of a set of readings; it is more than an expression of your educational values or an announcement of your prescription for what ails education. A good paper is a logical and coherent analysis of the issues raised within your chosen area of focus. This means that your paper should aim to explain rather than describe. If you give examples, be sure to tell the reader what they mean in the context of your analysis. Make sure the reader understands the connection between the various points in your

paper.

5. Provide depth, insight, and connections: The best papers are ones that go beyond making obvious points, superficial comparisons, and simplistic assertions. They dig below the surface of the issue at hand, demonstrating a deeper level of understanding and an ability to make interesting connections.

6. Support your analysis with evidence: You need to do more than simply state your ideas, however informed and useful these may be. You also need to provide evidence that reassures the reader that you know what you are talking about, thus providing a foundation for your argument. Evidence comes in part from the academic literature, whether encountered in this course or elsewhere. Evidence can also come from your own experience. Remember that you are trying to accomplish two things with the use of evidence. First, you are saying that it is not just you making this assertion but that authoritative sources and solid evidence back you up. Second, you are supplying a degree of specificity and detail, which helps to flesh out an otherwise skeletal argument.

7. Draw on course materials (this applies primarily to reaction papers, not the final paper). Your paper should give evidence that you are taking this course. You do not need to agree with any of the readings or presentations, but your paper should show you have considered the course materials thoughtfully.

8. Recognize complexity and acknowledge multiple viewpoints. The issues in the history of American education are not simple, and your paper should not propose simple solutions to complex problems. It should not reduce issues to either/or, black/white, good/bad. Your paper should give evidence that you understand and appreciate more than one perspective on an issue. This does not mean you should be wishy-washy. Instead, you should aim to make a clear point by showing that you have considered alternate views.

9. Challenge assumptions. The paper should show that you have learned something by doing this paper. There should be evidence that you have been open to changing your mind.

10. Do not overuse quotation: In a short paper, long quotations (more than a sentence or two in length) are generally not appropriate. Even in longer papers, quotations should be used sparingly unless they constitute a primary form of data for your analysis. In general, your paper is more effective if written primarily in your own words, using ideas from the literature but framing them in your own way in order to serve your own analytical purposes. However, selective use of quotations can be very useful as a way of capturing the author's tone or conveying a particularly aptly phrased point.

11. Cite your sources: You need to identify for the reader where particular ideas or examples come from. This can be done through in-text citation: Give the author's last name, publication year, and (in the case of quotations) page number in parentheses at the end of the sentence or paragraph where the idea is presented -- e.g., (Ravitch, 2000, p. 22); provide the full citations in a list of references at the end of the paper. You can also identify sources with footnotes or endnotes: Give the full citation for the first reference to a text and a short citation for subsequent citations to the same text. (For critical reaction papers, you only need to give the short cite for items from the course reading; other sources require full citations.) Note that citing a source is not sufficient to fulfill the requirement to provide evidence for your argument. As spelled out in #6 above, you need to transmit to the reader some of the substance of what appears in the source cited, so the reader can understand the connection with the point you are making and can have some meat to chew on. The best analytical writing provides a real feel for the material and not just a list of assertions and citations. Depth, insight, and connections count for more than a superficial collection of glancing references. In other words, don't just mention an

array of sources without drawing substantive points and examples from these sources; and don't draw on ideas from such sources without identifying the ones you used.

12. Take care in the quality of your prose: A paper that is written in a clear and effective style makes a more convincing argument than one written in a murky manner, even when both writers start with the same basic understanding of the issues. However, writing that is confusing usually signals confusion in a person's thinking. After all, one key purpose of writing is to put down your ideas in a way that permits you and others to reflect on them critically, to see if they stand up to analysis. So you should take the time to reflect on your own ideas on paper and revise them as needed. You may want to take advantage of the opportunity in this course to submit a draft of the final paper, revise it in light of comments, and then resubmit the revised version. This, after all, is the way writers normally proceed. Outside of the artificial world of the classroom, writers never turn in their first draft as their final statement on a subject.