

Sociology 113AC: The Sociology of Education

Summer 2017, Session D (July 3 – August 10)

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20 Barrows Hall

Monday–Thursday 2pm to 4pm

Course Description

In recent decades, the United States' public education system has been mired in multiple controversies. Low performing students, a racial gap in achievement, and the disruptive and hostile environment of many urban schools are just a few of the chronic problems that have provoked aggressive reform efforts with questionable results. The widely publicized struggles facing the nation's urban schools – serving increasingly poor and racially marginal communities – lead many to question both the quality of our public schools and the ability of “disadvantaged” students to learn.

In this course, we will bring a sociological lens to the problem of inequality in public education. At their core, schools are institutions that rank and order individuals, placing students within a hierarchy of achievement, employment, and social class. Research continues to show that students from a lower class background tend to perform less well in school, setting them up to remain lower class as they grow older. On the one hand, we can analyze the social and cultural background of students and consider how students' home life and personal attributes might limit their potential for academic success. On the other hand, features of the school and the educational process might favor students from more privileged backgrounds while making it difficult for other students to succeed.

To understand this relationship between education and inequality, we will ask how social inequalities manifest in the classroom and how school power dynamics privilege or punish certain cultures. Tackling these issues requires a critical analysis of race, class, and gender as they intersect in the school experiences of American youth from different backgrounds. The readings in this course, therefore, cover both a range of educational topics and a diversity of social groups and contexts within the U.S., drawing on comparisons from other countries along the way.

The six week course is organized according to major areas of focus within the sociology of education. The first two weeks cover major sociological theories of educational inequality and outline the history of America's public education system and its legacies of racial exclusion. The third week covers present day dynamics of race, class, gender, and nationality within school. During the fourth week, we consider different approaches to classroom instruction, like ability grouping and bilingual education, that might contribute to a stronger and more equitable education. Week 5 takes a broader look at major education policy initiatives over recent years through student led research and debates on four distinct policy strategies. Week 6 concludes the course by considering alternative models designed to counteract the patterns of inequality that continue to characterize formal schooling in the U.S. and abroad.

Ultimately this course will force us to reconsider the nature of class and inequality in the United States and in human societies more generally. At the heart of these issues is the ongoing

question of race versus class. In what ways do racial or class categories organize the way we relate to one another and the way social institutions distribute opportunities and influence? After taking a critical perspective on how schools interact with social divisions and hierarchies, students will be compelled to imagine alternative ways of organizing the education system, calling into question what counts as legitimate academic learning and the ways we distribute status and opportunities through schooling.

Course Requirements

1) Class Participation (20% of your grade)

Students are expected to come to class prepared to learn, to think, and to discuss issues raised in the course. Course participation includes attendance, coming to class prepared, participation in small group exercises and class discussion, and your performance on pop quizzes. Absences can be excused with appropriate documentation. More than one unexcused absence can negatively impact your participation score.

The course involves a number of short reading assignments. The readings are limited due to the short summer term, but it is imperative that students keep up with the mandatory assigned readings. I may use random quizzes at the start of class to determine who has completed readings.

2) Personal History Reflection (20% of your grade)

We all have some knowledge about the themes of this course from our personal experience in school, and throughout this class we will draw on that experience to examine sociological concepts and questions. While the focus of this course is public education in the United States, you can apply the theories and concepts of this course no matter what your educational background.

By the start of Week 4, you will each complete a Personal History Reflection on the relationship between social background factors and educational outcomes in your own life. Students will have the option of completing either a maximum 1400 word paper or a maximum 8 minute presentation, applying theories from the course to your own experience. Flexibility may be offered to students who prefer not to discuss their home lives or propose a different medium for presenting their work.

3) Midterm Evaluation (15% of your grade)

At the end of Week 4, students will take a one-hour exam assessing their comprehension of key readings and concepts from the course. Students will also be provided an opportunity to evaluate the course. You will be encouraged to use your sociological lens to analyze the dynamics of this class, reflect on your own involvement, and evaluate the strengths and shortcomings of the instructor's approach.

4) Debate Exercise (15% of your grade)

During Week 5, the class will split into four groups to research four separate policy issues in public education. Each group will break into two teams – for and against – and prepare to debate a policy proposal in line with its issue. You will be provided time in-class to read about and prepare arguments. You will be graded both on your individual contributions and on your team’s collective performance in the debate.

5) Final Writing Assignment (30% of your grade)

Students will complete a maximum 1700 word research paper on a specific aspect or method in K-12 public schools that should be reformed or implemented to counteract existing inequities in U.S. public education. Students can choose from among the topics discussed in class (like tracking or ethnic studies) or select another topic (like teacher professional development or college entrance exams). Topic suggestions and select references will be provided to help you get started. More information to come.

Course Policies

1) Grading Structure

This class uses a relatively standard grading schema. All assignments, and final grades, will be computed using the following grading scheme:

A+ ≥ 97%	97 > A ≥ 93	93 > A- ≥ 90
90 > B+ ≥ 87	87 > B ≥ 83	83 > B- ≥ 80
80 > C+ ≥ 77	77 > C ≥ 73	73 > C- ≥ 70 (and so on)

2) Academic Honesty

This is a course designed to provoke critical thinking. While I encourage study groups and working together to understand course material, all written work should be your own. Please do not use other students’ work for your assignments. If you cite an author or use his/her ideas, please cite properly. Plagiarized assignments will receive an F. More information on what constitutes as plagiarism is available from the UC Berkeley Campus Code of Student Conduct: <http://sa.berkeley.edu/student-code-of-conduct>. If you have any further questions, please ask.

3) Special Needs / Accommodations for Disabled Students

I am committed to creating a learning environment welcoming of all students. If you have any special needs, please notify me as soon as possible so that

appropriate accommodations can be made. I should have received any DSP accommodation forms in advance, but please verify with me that I have your documentation and consult with me about specific accommodations. If an unexpected personal or medical challenge is interfering with your ability to complete assignments and/or attend class, it is your responsibility to contact me as early as possible.

Course Timeline and Readings¹

Week 1: Key Problems in the Sociology of Education

We will use the first week to introduce the major themes of the course and learn some historical background on the modern education system. Public education in the U.S. and abroad has become widely accessible at higher levels over the course of the 20th century. Formal schooling serves many purposes, and we will discuss both the proper role that schools should play in society and the actual function of the education system in our lives. Focusing on the goal of equal opportunity and social mobility for all, we will learn about a number of sociological critiques of the education system, which argue that schools do not help foster equal opportunity but instead do more to help create and maintain social inequalities. Throughout the course we will consider these critiques as we learn about different aspects of the education system.

Monday, July 3

Introductions. Course overview.

Tuesday, July 4

HOLIDAY – NO CLASS

Wednesday, July 5

Public schooling in U.S. history: providing equal opportunity or reproducing existing inequality?

Bowles, Sam. & Herbert Gintis. (1976). *Schooling in capitalist America: Educational reform and the contradictions of economic life*. NY: Basic Books. [Read from page 129 (“But the reproduction of consciousness”) to page 133 (“the occupational hierarchy”).]

Thursday, July 6

Social inequality and the power dynamics of teaching and learning

hooks, bell. (1994). *Confronting class in the classroom*. In bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the practice of freedom* (Chapter 12: 177-190). London: Routledge.

¹ Required readings are written in **bold**. Non-bold readings will be covered in class.

Week 2: Race and Inequality in U.S. Public Education

The dream of universal education in the United States was not typically intended to include all Americans until relatively recently. Before 1954, racial segregation in public education was permitted by the constitution and mandated by law in many Southern states. As we will learn, various forms of segregation and racial division have impacted people of color in all parts of the country, and some of these practices continue today. We will investigate key historical debates on the problem of racial educational inequality and the debate over whether racial discrimination or class inequality are to blame for persisting educational disparities. Drawing different perspectives from the Civil Rights Movement and scholarly research, we then turn to the patterns of educational inequality in the U.S. today, asking ourselves which explanations are most relevant to our current reality.

Monday, July 10

The racial divide in U.S. public education – historical background and contemporary context.

Tuesday, July 11

Brown v. Board of Education and the search for a solution

U.S. Supreme Court. (1967). "Brown vs. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas: The U.S. Supreme Court Decision on School Desegregation." [Read pages 115 to 120].

Wednesday, July 12

Debating 'race versus class' during and after the Civil Rights Movement.

Coleman, James. (1967). "Equal Schools or Equal Students?" [Pages 122 to 127].

McKissick, Floyd. (1967). "A Communication: Is Integration Necessary?" Letter to the editor, *The New Republic*. [Read in class].

Thursday, July 13

The sociology of school failure: alternative diagnoses of educational inequality.

Payne, Charles M. (1984). *Getting what we ask for: The ambiguity of success and failure in urban education*. [Read from p. 18 ("Works like Justin's") to p. 20 ("leave something to be desired"), and read pp. 50-59 on The Production of Disorder].

Turner, Cory, et. al. (2016, April 18). Why America's schools have a money problem. School Money, NPR.org. http://www.npr.org/2016/04/18/474256366/why-americas-schools-have-a-money-problem?utm_campaign=storyshare&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_medium=social

Week 3: Culture Clash in the Classroom:

Dynamics of race, class, gender, and nationality in public school

Sometimes schools interact with social inequality in subtle ways that are difficult to measure. This week we consider a number of studies that go inside the classroom and analyze how types of social classification (like race, class, gender, and nationality) mediate interactions among students and between students and adults. We use this research to raise questions about the priorities and assumptions of schools and educators. Do schools devalue certain cultures and learning styles? Are schools effective in including and encouraging all students even when they come from diverse and unequal backgrounds? Do social and cultural differences among students make it inevitable that some groups will outperform others? We draw on sociological studies of different racial and ethnic groups to develop preliminary answers to these complex questions.

Monday, July 17

How your class background shapes your school experience

Lareau, Annette. (2003). *Unequal childhoods: Class, race, and family life*. [Read pp. 107-120, 124-127, and 134-143].

Tuesday, July 18

Cultural capital, gender inequality, and limited pathways to success

Carter, Prudence. (2005). *Keepin' it Real: School success beyond black and white* (pp. 19-39). Oxford University Press.

Wednesday, July 19

Race, class, and oppositional attitudes in school

Bettie, J. (2014). *Women without class: Girls, race, and identity*. Univ. of California Press. [Read pp. 57-72].

Thursday, July 20

Immigration, ethnic difference, and the school experience

EITHER Bettie, J. (2014). *Women without class: Girls, race, and identity*. Univ. of California Press. [Read pp. 80-92].

OR Gibson, M. et. al. (2013). "Different systems, similar results: Youth of immigrant origin at school in California and Catalonia," in *The children of immigrants at school: A comparative look at integration in the United States and Western Europe*. [Read pp. 101-108].

Zhou, M., & Bankston, C. (1998). *Growing up American: How Vietnamese children adapt to life in the United States* (Chapter 6: pp. 130-159). Russell Sage Foundation.

Week 4: Ensuring Effective and Equitable Teaching: Organizing classroom instruction to better serve all students

The typical public school teacher has a lot of control over what goes on in their classroom each day, but basic policies and practices of principals and administrators shape their work in important ways. This week we raise a few questions regarding the organization of classroom teaching, considering which students get grouped together, which teachers are selected to teach them, and what students are expected to learn (and unlearn). We will discuss the appropriate goals and methods of classroom instruction, focusing on debates over tracking (grouping students by ability) and bilingual education. After presenting or turning in your Personal History Reflection on Monday, your job is to choose an issue in K-12 education to research and write about in your Final Essay assignment. I will provide a list of potential topics and resources to get you started. A short Midterm Evaluation will be administered on Thursday.

Monday, July 24

Personal History Reflection FINAL DUE DATE

Tuesday, July 25

Social and institutional causes of bad teaching

Payne, C. M. (2008). *So much reform, so little change*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press. [Read pp. 67-72 and EITHER pp. 72-81 OR pp. 81-92].

Gouldner, H., & Strong, M. S. (1978). *Teachers' pets, troublemakers, and nobodies: Black children in elementary school*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press.

Wednesday, July 26

The politics and promise of multilingual and multicultural education

Perry, Theresa. (1998). "I 'on know why they be trippin'," in Theresa Perry and Lisa Delpit (eds.), *The Real Ebonics Debate: Power, language, and the education of African-American children* (pp. 3-16). Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Baldwin, James. (1998). "If Black English isn't a language, then tell me what is?" in Theresa Perry and Lisa Delpit (eds.), *The Real Ebonics Debate: Power, language, and the education of African-American children* (pp. 67-70). Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Thursday, July 27

Tracking or grouping students by ability – is there a better way?

Oakes, J. (2005). *Keeping track: How schools structure inequality*. New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press.

Dynarski, Susan. (2016, April 8). Why talented black and Hispanic students can go undiscovered. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/10/upshot/why-talented-black-and-hispanic-students-can-go-undiscovered.html>

Midterm Evaluation

Week 5: The Current Era of Education Policy Reforms:

Debating new efforts to improve the performance of public schools

This week we reflect on the challenges facing U.S. public education from the perspective of policymakers seeking to stimulate change from the top. We will learn about and debate four leading policy reform strategies designed to strengthen the quality of education and/or foster equal opportunity—charter schools, high-stakes testing, racial integration, and affirmative action. With the help of resources provided in class and on bCourses, each group will research its policy strategy and break into two teams to debate for and against the policy.

Monday, July 31

A new era of education policy: from integration and inclusion to accountability and choice

Tuesday, August 1

Digging deeper: researching the strengths and weaknesses of different policies

Wednesday, August 2

Debate Prep

Thursday, August 3

In-class Debates

Week 6: Imagining Alternatives:

Can public schools help a create a more equal and just world?

The Sociology of Education provides several interesting criticisms of formal schooling and the modern education system, but it is often short on solutions. We conclude the course by examining alternative models that challenge mainstream approaches to formal schooling and seek to overcome the systemic failures of our current system. These alternatives directly confront the critiques raised during earlier weeks. Ethnic studies courses upend the cultural hierarchies of traditional education, equitable approaches to math diverge from the existing emphasis on ranking and competition, and community school concepts respond to student disengagement and a lack of school accountability. We will investigate the merits and drawbacks of these approaches in class while students work out of class to complete their Final Essays by Friday, August 11.

Monday, August 7

The limitations of existing school reform efforts: reviewing arguments from Week 5 debates.

Tuesday, August 8

How should schools teach U.S. history and culture? The Ethnic Studies debate.

Tintiangco-Cubales, A., Kohli, R., Sacramento, J., Henning, N., Agarwal-Rangnath, R., & Sleeter, C. (2015). Toward an ethnic studies pedagogy: Implications for K-12 schools from the research. *The Urban Review*, 47(1), 104.

Wednesday, August 9

Why is math so hard? Equitable approaches to classroom learning.

Boaler, J. & Staples, M. (2008). Creating mathematical futures through an equitable teaching approach: The case of Railside School. *Teachers College Record*, 110, 3.

Thursday, August 10

Creating community schools that serve the whole child.

Sebring, P. B., et. al. (September 2006). The Essential Supports for School Improvement. Research Report, The Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago.

Friday, August 11

Final Essay DUE