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Social Foundations of Education: Theory Into Practice
EDF 5510 Fall 2001, Danville
Department of Secondary Education and Foundations

Unit Theme: Educator as creator of effective educational environments “Integrating students, subjects, strategies and societies”.

Text: Kathleen B. deMarrais and Margaret D. Le Compte, The Way Schools Work. Longman, 1998.

Extended Description of the Class

The professional practice of teaching and public educational policy is widely debated at every level of influence and control. Local school boards and civic clubs, business and industry, state legislatures, the federal judiciary, and Congress all feud over what is best. (Curiously, classroom teachers and school administrators are barely visible in the national dialogue.)

Although everyone has an opinion on nearly every topic, the discussions are largely uninformed, and in no way do they approach rational discourse. Myths, prejudice, special interests, and sloppy logic seem to invade our thinking when an issue in education is introduced.

The goal of this course is to cultivate in the student the skill of critical thinking with focus on contemporary issues in American education and schooling. The purpose is to enable the student to participate in the dialogue affecting education and schooling in a manner that others will characterize as intellectually honest, professionally informed, and ethically grounded. Toward this end, the course is designed around several contemporary controversies that have engaged both the public and the profession. Students will focus on these issues as they are discussed in articles appearing in leading journals, and they will engage in conversation with leaders who represent a range of political and intellectual persuasions. The necessary preparation to read critically and discuss cogently will require background information on the sociological, historical, and philosophical foundations that pertain to the issues. The premise of the course is that a professional educator must combine a broad knowledge of the discipline of foundations of education with the ability to read, listen, think, speak, and write logically, coherently, persuasively, about issues affecting education and schooling.

This graduate seminar, therefore, is designed to explore the various roles and relationships of education in American Society and to enable the participants to develop better understanding of the issues and problems confronting education and American Society.

Course Goals

Apply themes identifiable in the history of American education to a study of controversial issues in

public education policy.

Interpret current events and developments in American education and schooling from a perspective of historical precedent.

Recognize and analyze the confrontations between various educational philosophies that appear in controversial issues in education and schooling.

Begin forming and critically assessing a personal philosophy of education.

Examine political and economic influences on state and federal educational policy.

Investigate the causal factors of social problems found in schools.

Trace the evolution of legal principles applying to American education.

Critique the method of logical proof used in a discussion or essay dealing with education or schooling.

Detect logical fallacies used in arguments dealing with controversial issues in education.

Articulate positions on issues in education with accurate evidence and valid reasoning.

Acquire the habit of reflective reading and writing.

Continue a dialogue on permanent questions found in teaching, learning, and schooling.

Define the role of the teacher in the process of forming, revising, and implementation.

Participate as a responsible professional in the continuing process of educational policy formation, revision, and implementation.

Articulate the values that comprise a system of ethics for teachers.

Clarify issues in education from a framework of ethics.

Course Activities and Assignments

1. **Discussion:** Class discussion will be based primarily on articles from anthologies of current essays on education. Students will be expected to read the assignments prior to class so that class discussions can be informed conversations that lead to deeper understanding of the issues, rather than sessions that merely expose pre-existing opinions. The instructor does not expect the class to agree with him. In fact, frequently the instructor will attempt to stimulate divergent thinking by advocacy of various points of view. The student's responsibility in a discussion is to enhance intellectual growth in the class by making comments that represent an authentic personal position.

The instructor will evaluate students on the basis that their contributions reflect understanding of the issues and underlying concepts treated in the course. Ten per cent of the final grade will be determined by the instructor's assessment of contribution to class discussion.

2. **Reading Journal:** Each student will keep a journal of personal reflections on readings from this course, or any other reading, listening, or viewing done during the semester that might pertain to issues affecting education. The entries should be the product of free writing, not necessarily careful composition, and they should reveal a critical (rather than merely literal) level of reading comprehension. Each journal will be treated as a confidential communication between the student and the instructor. Evaluation will be based on the instructor's assessment that the student attempted to respond to issues and reflect on them in an open and honest fashion. Fifteen per cent of the final grade will be determined by the instructor's assessment of the reading journal.

3. **Examinations:** Two exams are scheduled, including the final. Each exam will be designed for students to synthesize concepts by writing short essays. Study questions will be provided by the instructor prior to each exam. The first essay exams will be written at home without notes. Each exam will count as thirty per cent of the final grade.

4. **Personal Statement of Philosophy of Education:** Each student will write a personal statement of philosophy of education, preferably no longer than two typewritten pages. The personal philosophy will be due on the date of the final exam. The assignment will be evaluated on the extent to which the statement addresses essential philosophical questions, not the character of the philosophy. The statement must show the result of careful composition and serious contemplation. Fifteen per cent of the final grade will be determined by the instructor's assessment of the personal statement of philosophy.

Grading Procedure

Each assignment is graded on a twelve point scale, with grades assigned as letters (i.e., A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, ..., F). The following weights are assigned each assignment in calculating the final grade.

Exams (2 @ 30% each)	60%
Journal	15%
Statement of Philosophy	15%
Class Discussion	10%
Total for all assignments	100%

Attendance Policy

Class discussions need continuity in the circle of persons who participate. Therefore, regular attendance is expected. Unexcused absences will result in reduction of the final grade. Legitimate absences (e.g., illness, personal emergencies, etc.) are understandable. The student is expected to

keep the instructor informed of any need to be absent, otherwise the instructor will assume there is no reason for the absence.

Issues Examined

1. Culture and Schools (Can Equality and Equity Coexist?)
2. Perceptions of Education in America (For Better or Worse?)
3. Finding the Purpose of Education (What? How?)
4. The Reform Movement (Back to the Future?)
5. School Choice (The American Dream or Aristocracy?)
6. Church and State (What Does the "Clause" Establish?)
7. Morality and Values in Schools (Whether? Whose?)
8. The Ethics of Teaching (Is it Relative?)

Tentative Course Outline

Date	Topics	Assignments
8/17	Introduction of the course; overview of topics: Theoretical Frameworks	
8/18	The Social Organization of Schooling Inequities in school funding and possible remedies Hierarchical organization of the schools and possible alternatives Comparison of public schools, private schools, and home schooling	deMarrais: Chapters 1 and 2
9/21	Social Class and Its Relation to Schooling Parent power in determining eligibility for services or punishment The teacher's role in promoting middle-class values and lifestyles vs. adapting to students social class as a determiner of success in school	deMarrais: Chapter 5
	Curriculum and the Stratification of Knowledge Tracking and ability grouping: some alternatives Vocational education: adaptation to student interests or a form of tracking Four types of curricula: appropriateness to age level and subject matter Differentiated instruction for exceptional students: gifted and special needs	deMarrais: Chapter 6
9/22	The Labor Force in Education Merit pay and job specialization as rewards Teacher autonomy vs. accountability Respect for teachers: national and social class variations	deMarrais: Chapter 4

