

EDUCATION 375
Historical Perspectives on American Education
Spring 2013
W/F 2-3:15pm
Stein 133

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Office hours: Monday 2:00-3:30pm and Wednesday 10:00-11:30am

Course Description

Most Americans believe one of three things with regard to the history of education:

1. Schools have always been the way they are today
2. Schools were once terrible. Now they are better. In the future they will be great.
3. Schools were once great. Now they are so-so. In the future they will be terrible.

This course is designed to make you a member of the minority that does not believe any of these things. It is designed so that when you think about schools, you see them in the full arc of history and understand them as products of very specific choices that we made in the past and continue to make today.

More specifically, this course will explore the history of education in the U.S. from the Colonial Era to the present. In so doing, it will address schools in the broader context of American cultural developments and the rise of the modern state, and will serve as a window into three centuries of social, economic, religious, and political history. At the same time, this class will use the past as a way of explaining the present—examining why schools developed in the manner they did, identifying paths not taken, and highlighting particular policies and programs that gave rise to the educational system we know today.

Course Expectations

1. Readings. Do the assigned readings prior to class discussions and be prepared to ask and answer questions in class. As a rule of thumb, shorter readings should be read more slowly and more carefully than longer ones.

2. Participation in class. Participation in discussions, work, and email is important in this class as a way of deepening your understanding of the main ideas of the course and practicing key skills. Useful contributions take a number of forms—building on the comments of others, bringing new points to light, raising questions, carefully listening—but are common in that they foster an environment of discovery. In short, your participation is not merely as an *individual*, but as a *member of a whole*. Attendance is a requirement; missing more than two classes will require instructor consent.

3. Writing. We will focus a great deal on writing in this class, and you will be asked to complete several different kinds of assignments over the semester. This emphasis on writing reflects the discipline—all historians are also writers by trade. Additionally, however, it is designed as a service to you, because writing is so essential in the world beyond college, and because instruction around writing is often so inconsistent. For much more detail, see the Guidelines for Analytical Writing at the end of the syllabus.

*While you will not be explicitly evaluated on these course expectations, failure to meet them will adversely affect your ability to fully contribute as a member of the class and, consequently, your grade. Meeting 75% of expectations, in other words, roughly translates to a C.

Grading and Assignments

Your course grade will be broken down into the following categories:

1. Leading class discussion: 10%
2. Weekly blog posts: 20%
3. Integrated essays: 20% each
4. Final project: 30%

All assignments, unless otherwise noted, should be sent as MS Word documents via email. They should also be *single spaced*.

*Late work for all assignments will be graded down one-third of a grade (i.e. A→A-) for each day past due.

1. Leading class discussion
Due: Rolling deadline

Each student is responsible for guiding a portion of class discussion during one of our meetings. You may work alone for this or with a partner, and you may choose which of the meetings you wish to lead. This will be decided on a first-come, first-serve basis. Plan on leading the first 15 minutes of class and plan to do the following:

- Give us some information we didn't have before
- Ask us some questions
- Help us understand the reading better

You will be evaluated on your ability to identify major issues and themes in the readings, the depth of your questions, your ability to effectively draw-out student response, and the way in which you connect student comments together to produce a coherent string of dialogue. Questions about your particular work on this assignment can be discussed during office hours.

2. Weekly blog post

Due: Each Thursday by 8pm EST (Weeks 2-14, *excluding* Weeks 5, 7, 10, 11)

The purpose of these blog posts is twofold. First, the assignment is designed to keep you thinking about the course readings and discussions. Education is a complex field and the more you think about it, the more your views will evolve. Second, it is designed to stimulate thought for others. That means that you should be reading other people's postings, considering, and commenting.

Posts should be between 300 and 500 words in length. None of this needs to be carefully polished, but your writing should substantively use readings from the week—as evidence, as a springboard for a new idea, as a punching bag, etc. Each post should be focused on the themes from the readings.

You will be evaluated on a 1-6 scale on the following:

- Your post meets the word requirement
- Your post substantively uses at least one reading (meaning that you engage with some key component of it rather than merely mentioning it)
- Your post offers a distinct take from the postings of your classmates (some overlap is acceptable, but this means you need to keep an eye on what others write)
- Your post relies on evidence to support claims; in other words, provide an example of whatever it is that you're talking about (but do not conduct outside research)
- Your post has a strong analytical component to it and offers an explanation of a persistent dilemma, a critical examination of some kind of phenomenon, a new take on an old issue, or a key insight (in other words, you aren't just saying what you feel about the reading)
- Your post reflects the clarity and quality of prose outlined in points 3 and 12 of the "Guidelines" section at end of syllabus
- Your post is respectful

3. Interpretive essays

Due: Feb. 22 and April 5

There is no prompt for these essays. Instead, each essay should begin with a question about something that interests you—a question like "how intentionally structured was educational inequality in the past?"

There are two keys here, then. The first is to come up with something that you're excited to think about. The second is to come up with a question that you can *actually answer*.

After coming up with your prompt, you will want to analyze at least two readings from the course to build a central argument that answers the question.

Key in this assignment will be avoiding summary. Instead, you should concentrate on making a point that enhances or complicates our understanding of a particular issue. Be sure that your central argument is at the core of your essay and that you cut out everything extraneous to that core argument.

You will be evaluated on the criteria laid out in the “Guidelines” section at the end of the syllabus. Read it. Read it twice. Read it three times. And when in doubt, email me.

Essays should be roughly 1500 words in length.

4. Final project

Presentations May 1 and May 3

Projects due May 8

For this project, you will be expert historians working to root out foolishness in contemporary policy debates.

More specifically, you will be working in teams of two or three to address the uses and abuses of history in education. How is history used in education policy? How is the past accurately presented? How is it distorted? What appears to be the purpose of drawing upon the past? What is problematic about such uses? What is important?

A. Your first task is to assemble a group. This project is a large-scale endeavor, and will require a team of 2-3 individuals working together. We will form groups in class.

B. Your next task is to begin gathering some materials on your topic. Example topics are teachers unions, standardized testing, school choice, and desegregation, but can be anything that is a part of current educational policy debates. Whatever the topic is, start collecting materials—reports, speeches, white papers, press releases, websites, etc.

C. Once you have gathered materials, you’ll want to start looking through them. Which ones reference history? If you don’t find enough that reference the past, you’ll want to go back to step B.

For an example of a policy argument that uses history, see Chester Finn’s article “Beyond the School District”: <http://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/beyond-the-school-district>

For a book-length example, see Paul Peterson’s book *Saving Schools*.

For a video example, see Sal Khan’s history of American education at:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=LqTwDDTjb6g

D. After you have found a few sources to work with, your task will be to analyze how history is being used in your materials. What are readers being led to believe about the role of the past? How does the portrayal of the past present a particular picture of the present? How accurate is that message? In order to gauge accuracy, you will need to figure out what actually happened in the past. That will bring you to step E.

E. Find a book, book chapter, or article that deals chiefly with the history or historical event in question. You will probably want to find multiple sources. Consider: how does this story—emerging from these historical sources—align with the picture of the past being presented in your materials from step C? Do they tell a different story? A more complicated story? A less interesting story? The exact same story?

F. Finally, you will want to figure out what this all means. What can you say generally about the usefulness of history in current policy debates? What can you say generally about the abuses of history?

G. Your final product will be a report that includes (at the minimum) the following items:

- An overview of how those writing or speaking about your topic use history (along with examples)
- An overview of how historians tend to address that topic (along with examples)
- An analysis of differences and similarities between treatments of the past (explaining what this reveals about the uses and abuses of history)
- Robust evidence supporting any and all claims
- An appendix in which you describe the methodology and tools used in conducting this study
- Description of work distribution in the group

Other details: your report should be no longer than 7 pages exclusive of endnotes and appendices (12-point size type and single-spaced).

You will be making final presentations to the class. Plan on 30 minutes. Be prepared for questions. All group members should participate in a way that reflects their contributions. This will count for 10% of your total project grade.

Course Texts

There is one required book for this course:

John Rury, *Education and Social Change: Themes in the History of American Education*, 2nd ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005)

The rest of the readings for this course will be posted on Moodle.

Classes and Readings

Week 1: “What is the relationship between the past and the present?”

Wednesday (1/23)

-No reading

Friday (1/25)

- Mary Metz, “Real School: A Universal Drama among Disparate Experience”

Week 2: “What are the origins of U.S. public education? And what is their influence?”

Wednesday (1/30)

- John Rury, *Education and Social Change*, chapter 1

- Massachusetts school law of 1647

Friday (2/1)

- Carl Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society*, chapter 2

- Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, chapter 3 (pages 30-43)

Week 3: “How did we get a system out of a disconnected smattering of schools?”

Wednesday (2/6)

- Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, chapter 5

- Horace Mann, 5th Annual Report to the State Board of Education of Massachusetts

- Horace Mann, 12th Annual Report to the State Board of Education of Massachusetts

Friday (2/8)

- Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America*, chapter 6 (Origins of mass public education)

Week 4: “How and why were schools organized the way they were?”

Wednesday (2/13)

- Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, chapter 6

Friday (2/15)

- Michael Katz, *Reconstructing American Education*, chapter 2

- Katz, *Reconstructing American Education*, chapter 3 (up to page 72)

Week 5: “How did people of the past think about cultural difference in school?”

Wednesday (2/20)

- Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars*, “First School War”

- “The Catholic Claim in New York,” “A Protestant Counter- Claim,” and “Bishop Hughes on the Catholic Position”

Friday (2/22)

- David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction*, chapter 4
 - “The First Year of the Carlisle Indian School” and “Government Schools for Indians”
 - Rury, chapter 3
- *2/22: First Interpretive Essays due

Week 6: “What is the history of teachers and teaching?”

Wednesday (2/27)

- Michael W. Sedlak, “Let Us Go and Buy a Schoolmaster,” in Donald Warren, ed., *American Teachers: Histories of a Profession at Work*

Friday (3/1)

- David Angus, “Professionalism and the Public Good” (History of Teacher Certification)

Week 7: NO CLASS

Week 8: “How did people of the past think about racial difference in school?”

Wednesday (3/13)

- James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, chapter 1
- Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, chapter 2

Friday (3/15)

- Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, chapter 5
- Booker T. Washington, “Industrial Education for the Negro”
- W.E.B. DuBois, “The Talented Tenth”

Week 9: “Did anyone ever try to anything radically different?”

Wednesday (3/20)

- Rury, chapter 4

Friday (3/22)

- Herbert Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum*, chapter 2
- John Dewey, “The Child and the Curriculum”

Week 10: The Struggle for Equality

Wednesday (3/27)

- Melissa Weiner, *Power, Protest, and the Public Schools*, chapter 2

Friday (3/29)

NO CLASS

Week 11: The Struggle for Equality, cont'd.

Wednesday (4/3)

- Brown v. Board of Education

Ravitch, *The Great School Wars*, “Fourth School War” (chapters 23-28)

Friday (4/5)

* Second Interpretive Essays due

Week 12: “What schooling world did my parents grow up in?”

Wednesday (4/10)

- Rury, chapter 5

Friday (4/12)

- David K. Cohen and Barbara Neufeld, “The Failure of High Schools and the Progress of Education,” *Daedalus* 110 (1981): 69-89

Week 13: “What’s the deal with colleges and universities?”

Wednesday (4/17)

- Martin Trow, “American Higher Education: Past, Present, and Future,” *Educational Researcher* 17, no. 3: 13-23

- Bowles and Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America*, chapter 8

Friday (4/19)

- Katz, *Reconstructing American Education*, chapter 6

- Clark Kerr, “Master Plan for California”

* Last blog posts

Week 14: “How has recent history shaped the way we think about schools?”

Wednesday (4/24)

- Jack Schneider, *Excellence For All*, chapter 1

Friday (4/26)

- Maris Vinovskis, *The Road to Charlottesville*

- “A Nation at Risk”

Week 15

Wednesday (5/1) and Friday (5/3)

Final Presentations in class

* Final Projects due 5/8

Guidelines

Guidelines for Critical Reading

As a critical reader of a particular text (a book, article, speech, proposal), you should 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 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 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.

1. Pick an important issue: make sure that your analysis meets the "so what" test. Why should anyone care about this topic? 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. 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. 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. Your papers 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. You should not reduce issues to either/or, black/white, good/bad. Papers should give evidence that you understand and appreciate more than one perspective on an issue.

9. Challenge assumptions. Papers should show that you have learned something. 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 papers are 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.

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.