Anthropology of Education (H525)
Fall, 2008

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Course Description and Objectives

Anthropologists are often perceived as quirky researchers who like to hang out for long periods of time in order to describe, interpret, and then critique an educational scene. This image may be partly true, but what does an anthropologist of education really do when s/he studies education? What kind of “science” does s/he conduct? What unique perspectives, methods, and concepts does the anthropologist contribute to our understanding of education, both in and out of school? And of what value are such concepts and perspectives? This course is designed to introduce the central concepts and methods used by cultural anthropologists to study and understand educational processes. It also aims to cultivate an appreciation of the range of educational problems and issues addressed by anthropologists. Students will develop basic competency in inferring cultural knowledge through observation and interpreting the cultural dimensions of education, and they will begin to develop and apply their own emerging anthropological perspective on education. Through close reading and discussion of original articles and monographs, the execution of a modest observation study, and the completion of a series of writing assignments, this course places a special emphasis on:

1) historical and comparative perspectives in educational anthropology,
2) the relation between identity, culture, and educational institutions,
3) the dilemma of immigrant education, and the question of cultural diversity and identity in contemporary nation-states,
4) inequality and social reproduction in schooling, and
5) the applications of anthropological understandings to questions of educational policy and practice. The course encourages students’ exploration of the anthropological literature for ways of framing and answering their own questions about education.

Required texts

Levinson, Bradley, et al. Schooling the Symbolic Animal: Social and Cultural Dimensions of Education. (SSA on course schedule)
Levinson, Bradley, et al. The Cultural Production of the Educated Person. (CPEP on course schedule)

In addition, many readings will be made available on electronic reserve. Password: education
Assignments and Evaluation

The basic requirements of the course are as follows:

- Inquiry Notes (5) 500 points or 50%
- Self-selected ethnography 100 points or 10%
- Observation Paper 100 points or 10%
- Final Essay 100 points or 10%
- Class participation 200 points or 20%

Your final grades will be awarded according to a cumulative point system. Each percentage point is worth 10 points; the total value of the course is therefore 1,000 points, with a grade distribution as follows: 1000-930=A, 929-900=A-, 899-880=B+, 879-830=B, 829-800=B-, 799-770=C+, 769-700=C.

**Inquiry Notes.** (500 points) Inquiry notes provide an important means for allowing the student to demonstrate learning and the instructor to assess the learning process. They also encourage deeper engagement with the ideas of the course. You should plan to get in the habit of documenting your reading of course materials. Keeping a record of your thoughts on the readings will be extremely valuable as you make connections and grow in your understanding of anthropology. It will also enrich our classroom discussions, since one of the main goals of the inquiry notes is to encourage students to initiate discussions around their questions and interests.

Maintain a notebook and take clear and thoughtful notes on the assigned reading(s) for each class. For five class sessions of your choice, **beginning on September 18th**, you will develop and post critical inquiry notes. What the notes should contain is evidence of an active, critical reader who raises questions and attempts to synthesize points from several of the readings for the week. Before each class meeting, prepare around two pages of notes (roughly 500-700 words). These notes should briefly summarize the readings (**Try to formulate in your own words what was the author’s main point in the selections, and perhaps answer some of that week’s guiding questions**). The notes should also give some indication of your reaction to the reading. When there are **more than 3 reading selections** for a given class meeting, you will want to focus your comments on the **three** readings for that class which interested you the most, though you should try to touch on as many of them as possible. Choose key passages and phrases that pique your interest, or perhaps that confuse you. Some general questions that you might use to guide your note writing include: What did you find most interesting or useful in the readings? What are the reading’s most important contributions to educational analysis? What did you find most troubling and problematic? Why? What aspects of your own experience (as “student” or “teacher” or “researcher”) make sense in light of the readings? How might the insights from the readings enable you to be a more effective student, teacher, administrator, researcher, or human being?

After each class meeting, spend some time consolidating what you learned in class. **Synthesize what you learned in your notebook, perhaps drawing on notes taken in class:** What did you learn from the instructor or your classmates? What did you find most interesting about class
discussion? How did the class clarify the readings or perhaps confuse you even more!? What would you still like to know or clarify in relation to the readings?

Altogether then, you should write approximately 800-1000 words for each of the five class sessions that you choose. You should post the first portion of the inquiry note before the class meets, preferably by Wednesday afternoon. Then, by the end of the weekend, you should post your full inquiry note on the Oncourse Forum. Feel free to respond to some of your classmates’ postings, too. Consideration for class participation will be given to those who respond to classmates’ inquiry notes!

You should submit a total of 5 inquiry notes. Five points will be deducted for each week that they are submitted late.

Inquiry notes are evaluated on the basis of thoroughness and thoughtfulness, balancing effort with the depth and acuity of thinking in relation to the readings. Inquiry notes are not polished pieces of writing. Grammar and style are lightly considered, but they are not nearly as important as the two factors that I weigh most: 1. Evidence of close, critical reading, with specific attention to details of the authors’ points and arguments, and 2. Frank assessments of the authors’ points, including what you found confusing, helpful, valuable, etc. Writing many pages for each inquiry note in order to demonstrate “effort” will not necessarily garner you a better grade, since quality and critical thinking count most. Typically, a strong and thoughtful inquiry note will receive a mark of 47 or 48 points out of 50, indicating “A” quality work. Exceptional postings may earn up to 50 points, while poor postings that do not show evidence of close reading may earn 40 points or less. Students may re-write or add to a posting with a grade lower than “42” in order to earn up to 45 points for it.

Self-selected ethnographies: (100 points) For November 13, you will prepare a set of inquiry notes based on your own reading of an ethnographic monograph, or a set of some 3 articles from Anthropology and Education Quarterly. You can choose these readings based on your own interests.

Observation Paper. (100 points) During the first two weeks of the course, you will choose and begin to observe an “educational scene” or site. This may or may not be a school or classroom. Take detailed fieldnotes on the observed patterns in the participants’ behavior and on the artifacts they use in their behavior. In addition to observations, you may or may not choose to conduct brief interviews, asking participants to explain their understanding of the scene and the processes you’ve observed. In early October, we will have a session in which you share your analysis of the cultural and educational processes you’ve observed at the site. You will describe recurrent behaviors and the artifacts used, and then attempt an interpretive analysis that construes the tacit cultural knowledge—the cultural meanings—that participants in the scene must have in order to participate effectively. Your 5 typed page paper is due October 3rd, and you can submit it through Oncourse.
**Final Essay.** (100 points) You will prepare a 5-page essay in which you demonstrate and apply your understanding of anthropological concepts and approaches from the course. Further guidelines will be provided.

**Class participation.** (200 points) The success of this course depends on your active and thoughtful participation. Regular attendance is crucial, as is a productive contribution to class discussions. This contribution can take many forms, including queries and comments in both small group and whole class formats. If you are shy or reluctant to participate, prompt yourself to make modest interventions, even in the form of questions, where it seems appropriate. If you like to take an active role, just be mindful of your less intrepid classmates and minimize excessive comments while inviting participation from others.

Attendance will be noted. Please advise me if you will need to miss a class, or if you missed a class for illness or some other reason. Each absence, even if justified, will drop your participation score by about 10 points. Your final point total for Participation will represent your attendance record balanced by the quality of your actual participation in class. Posting thoughtful replies to classmates’ inquiry notes in an Oncourse Forum can boost your level of participation.
Tentative Course Schedule

September 4  Introduction
Read on reserve:
Spradley, "Culture and ethnography"

Discuss: Educational histories; personal/cultural definitions of education; prior understandings of anthropology as a field of inquiry; observation possibilities
Activity: Observe an educational scene; articulate tacit cultural knowledge
Read: Sample notebook entries and observation papers

September 11  Anthropology as a Field of Inquiry
Read on reserve:
Keesing, "The anthropological approach"
Peacock, "Substance"
Kuper, “Anthropology”
Read from SSA:
Levinson, Schooling the Symbolic Animal (SSA), pp. 1-11
Levinson, “Education for Cultural Continuity and Change”
**Office meetings with professor
**Start observation project!

September 18  Culture, Ethnography, and the Anthropological Toolkit
Read on reserve:
Miner, “Body Ritual among the Nacirema”
Glesne and Peshkin, “Being There”
Wolcott, “Ethnography as a Way of Seeing”
Rosaldo, “Eroding the Classical Norms”
Optional:
Marcus and Fischer, “Ethnography and Interpretive Anthropology”

September 25  The Symbolic Animal Across Societies
Read from SSA:
Levinson, pp. 15-24
Geertz, Chap. 1
Williams, Chap. 2
Mead, Chap. 3
Basso, Chap. 4
Durkheim, Chap. 6
Becker, Chap. 8
Optional:
Hansen, “Education and the Transmission of Knowledge”
October 2  *Observation Paper Discussion*

**Bring your paper to class for sharing**

October 9  *Formal Schooling as a Historical and Cultural Phenomenon*

**Read from SSA:**
Sutton, pp. 77-82
Rival, Chap. 10
Flinn, Chap. 11
Bledsoe, Chap. 12
*Optional:*
Cohen, Chap. 9

*View: Kenya Boran*

October 16  *Cultural Conflict and Discontinuity Approaches*

**Read from SSA:**
Foster, pp. 161-167
Heath, Chap. 13
Ogbu, Chap. 14
Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg, Chap. 15

**Read from CPEP:**
Foley, Chap. 3

**Read on reserve:**
Wilcox, "Ethnography as a methodology..."

October 23  *Self, Identity, and the Sociocultural World*

**Read on reserve:**
Wolcott, “Propriospect and the Acquisition of Culture”
Holland et al, “A practice theory of self and identity”

**Read from CPEP:**
Eisenhart, Chap. 7 “The Production of Biologists at School and Work”
Luttrell, Chap. 4 “Becoming Somebody in and Against School”

**Read from SSA:**
Mehan, Chap. 18
Eisenhart, Chap. 24
*Optional:*
Shaw, CPEP, Chap. 8
October 30 Cultural Production and Reproduction in Schooling
Read on reserve:
Willis, “Introduction,” Learning to Labor
Read from CPEP:
Levinson and Holland, Chap. 1 (Intro)
Connell et al, Chap. 20
Holland and Eisenhart, Chap. 19
Read on reserve:
Diamond et al, “Teachers’ expectations and sense of responsibility…”

November 6 (continued)
Read from CPEP:
Levinson, Chap. 9
Luykx, Chap. 10
Rockwell, Chap. 12
Read from SSA:
Eder, Chap. 17
Fordham, Chap. 21
Optional:
Zine, “Muslim youth in Canadian schools”
Keaton, “Arrogant assimilationism”
Skinner and Holland, Chap. 11

November 13 Self-Selected Ethnographies

**Bring inquiry notes from your individual reading**

November 20 Moral Education and the Immigrant’s Dilemma
Read: Smith-Hefner, Khmer American (selected chapters)

December 4
TBA
December 11 *New Directions for Anthropology of Education*

**Read from SSA:**
Eisenhart, pp. 317-326
Nespor, Chap. 22

**Read on reserve:**
Fetterman, "Ethnography and policy"
Levinson, Sutton, and Winstead, “Education policy as a practice of power”
Foley, Levinson, and Hurtig, “Anthropology goes inside”
Camarrota, “The cultural organizing of youth ethnographers…”
Hurtig, “Community, writing, participatory research…”

**Optional:**
Porter, “’We are mountain’…”
Fine et al, “Educating beyond the borders of schooling”
Spindler and Spindler, “What is cultural therapy?”
Bartlett et al., “The marketization of education”
Duncan-Andrade, “Urban youth, media literacy…”

*Final Essays due on Tuesday, December 16th, at 5 p.m.*