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EPE/SOC 661  
SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION  
Fall 1998

Overview

EPE 661 is designed for graduate students in education who wish to develop sociological perspectives for viewing their field. As such, the course is intended to introduce students to education and its relationship to social structure. It is not specifically intended to give teachers or future teachers classroom techniques which will make them better teachers. The course is organized around particular concerns and issues involving (for example) the relationship between formal schooling and socialization, social stratification, bureaucratization and economic development. A complete list of topical areas to be covered follows.

Evaluation

Evaluations for the course will be based on student performance on two take-home examinations. Students will have approximately one week on two occasions to complete and return essay format answers to several questions I will pose. There will be 80 points (total) possible for these two examinations.  

In addition, each student will write a 10-15 page paper on some "hot topic" in public education or a new program in your school, viewed sociologically. A brief synopsis of these papers will be presented in class by students near the end of the term. This assignment will be worth twenty points of your final grade. Students receiving 90 points or better on the three evaluation activities will guarantee an "A" in the course; a combined score of 80 will guarantee a "B"; etc.

Class Meetings: Monday, 4:00-6:30 p.m.

Texts


Collins, Randall. **Four Sociological Traditions**
Tentative Course Outline

September 13  Topic: Sociology and the Social Sciences

1. Randall Collins, Prologue
2. Peter Berger: Invitation to Sociology (handout)
3. C. Wright Mills: The Sociological Imagination

September 20  Topic: The Durkheimian Tradition ... and Schooling

1. Randall Collins, Chapter 3
2. Emile Durkheim: Precontractual Solidarity (handout)
3. Ballantine reader: Jackson; Waller.

September 27  Topic: Functionalism and its Critique:

1. Ballantine reader: Parsons; King.
2. Brint: Chapters 1 and 2

October 4   Topic: The Transmission of Knowledge and Values

1. Dreeben "On What is Learned in School" (handout)
2. Brint: Chapters 5 and 4.
3. Ballantine reader: Page and Clelland

October 11  Topic: Social Capital and the School (Dr. Patricia Dyk.)

2. Ballantine reader: Scott and Meyer; Spring
3. James Coleman reading (handout)

October 18  Topic: Students as Members, Clients or Products? The School as a Formal Organization

1. Brint, Chapter 8
2. Ballantine reader: Gamoran and Dreeben; Flaming; Lortie; Dreeben; Rogers.

(FIRST EXAM ABOUT HERE)


1. Brint, Chapter 6
November 1      Topic: Conflict Traditions and Educational Inequality
1. Randall Collins, Chapter 1
2. Collins "Conflict Theory of Stratification" (handout)
3. Bourdieu "The Forms of Capital" (handout)
4. Ballantine reader: Collins

November 8      NO CLASS

November 15     Topic: Class, Race, Gender and Schooling
1. Brint, Chapter 7
2. Ballantine reader: Kane; Colclough and Beck; Carnoy and Levin; Grant; Moore and Smith

November 22     The Microinteractionist Tradition
1. Randall Collins, Chapter 4
2. The Social Psychology of G.H. Mead (Meltzer, handout); The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (Goffman, handout).

November 29     Cultural Reproduction Theories and the School (Dr. Diane Haleman)
1. Sociology and the School (Peter Woods, handout)
2. Ballantine reader: Apple and Weis; Willis; Anyon; Lubeck

(SECOND EXAM ABOUT HERE)

December 4      The Politics of Educational Change
Social science derives from a social base. In this statement there are two paradoxes. Science means knowledge about the objective world that is true because that is the way things are, not just because we have imagined it. Yet, this science is now asserted to be socially based, determined by the society in which social scientists live. That is paradox one.

Paradox two is that the social base is nevertheless held to exist. It is an autonomous, objective world that exists independently of individuals and that determines what they think. If social science is successful, one might even someday write the objective laws of this social determination of ideas (Collins, p3).

Social thought develops only if carried by a community that preserves earlier contributions and builds on them (p5).

For any objective social knowledge to develop, two things had to happen. First, societies (or at least parts of them) had to become rationalized - in Max Weber's term, disenchanted. ... The second condition (was) the rise of a social community of their own - an intellectual community - within which the search for knowledge in its own right could receive support (p. 5).

The major contribution of the Middle Ages to subsequest thought was not an idea, but an institution: the rise of the university (p. 8).

(Although) most of the students (at university) then as now were mere place-seekers and carousers with no intellectual concerns, (they were) places where intellectuals were brought physically into contact and insulated from the pressures of the rest of the world (p. 9).

Sociology, as the general science of social phenomena, has the most diverse roots of all. It derives from the material of history and from the generalizing attempts of philosophers of history, from the fact-gathering of public administrators and social reformers, from socially-minded psychologists, and from the interests of anthropologists in primitive culture and
human evolution (p. 38).
Sociology like the other social sciences got its academic home because its political and practical themes were in keeping with the prevailing atmosphere of liberalism and with the practical and popular emphasis of the expanding universities (p. 42).

(Sociologists) continue to hold the view that the study of shared, patterned, human relationships should serve a dual purpose: sociology for the sake of understanding; and, understanding for the sake of providing solutions to the problems that beset (man) and (his) world (handout p2).

(Auguste) Compte ... outlined a three-tiered approach to the study of society, a study that may be at once theoretical, empirical and practical. The theoretical aspect pertains to abstract generalizations about the origins, structures, and functions of the various elements of social life, and a search for universal laws; the empirical aspect is concerned with what one might actually learn from observation, comparison, and experimentation; and the practical aspect emphasizes the direct or indirect application to social conditions of theoretical assumptions and research findings (p 2).

The first fruit of (the sociological imagination) is the idea that the individual can understand (his) own experience and guage (his) own fate only by locating (himself) within his (historical) period, (and) that he can know his own chances in life only by becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstances (mills, p6).

The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and its promise (p. 6).

Perhaps the most fruitful distinction with which the sociological imagination works is between "the personal troubles of milieu" and "the public issues of social structure." This distinction is an essential tool of the sociological imagination and a feature of all classic work in social science (p8).

To ask sociological questions (presupposes) that one is interested in looking some distance beyond the commonly accepted or officially defined goals of human actions. It presupposes a certain awareness that human events have different levels of meaning, some of which are hidden from the consciousness of everyday life (Berger p22).
The sociological problem is always the understanding of what goes on here in terms of social interaction. Thus the sociological problem is not so much why some things "go wrong" from the viewpoint of the authorities and the management of the social scene, but how the whole system works in the first place, what are the presuppositions and by what means is it held together. The fundamental sociological problem is not crime but the law, not divorce but marriage, not racial discrimination but racially defined stratification, not revolution but government (Berger, p25)