Critical Social Theory in Educational Studies

This course familiarizes students with critical social theorists often utilized by scholars in the academy. Goals of the course are to consider the following kinds of questions about critical social theory: What is it? How can it be useful? For example, how are power and resistance theorized, and how can we study and utilize such constructs in educational research? How can we use theory to organize daily struggles against unjust power in education and other parts of society?

(An asterisk before a title means it is a book that you should purchase or otherwise obtain.)

January 31. What are the Uses of Critical Social Theory?
What is critical social theory? What can it help us do (and un-do)? Several ways theory affects, and is affected by, empirical research.

Overview of Pierre Bourdieu (handout)

February 7. Pierre Bourdieu: Symbolic Capital

February 14. Pierre Bourdieu: Cultural and Social Reproduction

Educational writing using Pierre Bourdieu:
Lareau and Horvath (critique of sociological uses of P.B; social capital and families in different social classes.)
Stanton-Salazar (social capital and Latino students)
Prudence Carter (social capital and Black communities)
James Albright (literacy education)
Madeline Perez (social and cultural capital and high school admissions in NYC. GC dissertation , 2011)
February 21 is a Monday schedule. No class.

February 28. Foucault: Knowledge/Power/Resistance
Introduction to Foucault’s thought (handout).

*Foucault, History of Sexuality, Vol. 1. Pages 1-102 (Read up to, but not including the chapter titled “Domain”)

March 6: Foucault: Genealogy

Foucault and Method (handout)

Education writing with Foucault at the center:
Dangerous Encounters: Genealogy and Ethnography. Tamboukou
Dangerous Coagulations: The Uses of Foucault in the Study of Education. Baker and Heyning
Doing Foucault in Early Childhood Studies. MacNaughton
David Carlson’s articles on using Foucault in English Education
Darla Linville, LGBTQ Teens and Care of the Self. GC dissertation, 2009


March 20. Karl Marx: Capitalism and Class Struggle


March 27. Antonio Gramsci: Class and Culture
*Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology. Kate Crehan. 2002. (Chapters 2, 4, 5, 6 only)

April 3. David Harvey: Neoliberalism as a Capitalist Class Project
*David Harvey. A Brief History of Neoliberalism. 2007.

April 6-15 is Spring vacation. No Class April 10.

April 17. April 3. Nancy Fraser: Redistribution, Recognition, and Representation
Nancy Fraser. Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World. 2010. (Chapters TBA)
April 24: Saba Mahmood: Rethinking Western Feminism; Merton and Middle Range Theories
*Saba Mahmood. Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject. 2004. (Chapters TBA)


May 1: Patricia Hill Collins. Intersectionality

May 8. Race and Whiteness
*Zeus Leonardo. Race, Whiteness, and Education. 2009.


Final Project

The final project is a paper, 10 - 15 single spaced pages, not counting the bibliography.

In this paper, please develop your thoughts on theory. The twin goals of the paper are 1) to critique a theory (or theories) we have read in terms of some criterion/criteria you establish, and 2) to describe a theory (or theories) that you think may have relevance to your dissertation research. The theory/ies you describe that may have relevance to your dissertation do NOT have to be ones we read in class. Be sure to spend as much ink in the paper on the second goal as the first.

NOTE: The intellectual work you do for this paper, and perhaps large chunks of the paper itself, may be very useful in writing your second doc exam and your dissertation proposal.

Other Recommended Theorists (in no particular order):

Deleuze and Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus.*
Iris Marion Young. *Justice and the Politics of Difference.*
Henri Lefebvre. *Critique of Everyday Life.*
Edward Soja. *Seeking Spatial Justice.*
Patricia Williams. *Alchemy of Race and Rights.*
Dolores Delgado Bernal, C. Alejandra Elenes, Francisca E. Godinez, and Sofia Villenas. *Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life: Feminist Perspectives on Pedagogy and Epistemology*
Dorothy Holland. *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds.*
George Lipsitz. *How Racism Takes Place.*
Hester Eisenstein. *Feminism Seduced.*
Frantz Fanon. *Black Skin White Masks.*