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An examination of reading and writing education from historical, theoretical, critical, and pedagogical perspectives. Course questions include the role of literacy in a global society and the influences of policies and political practices. Research studies that have shaped literacy instruction in the last century are considered.

Course Objectives

1. Analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of alternative theoretical frameworks for conceptualizing literacy and literacy acquisition.
2. Focus on current and previous national, state and local policies
3. Examination of selected issues related to literacy instruction.
4. Sensitivity to evolving functions and impacts of literacy and the policy implications of these trends.
5. Appreciation of challenges to literacy development faced by selected special populations, and of strategies for meeting those challenges.
6. Development of a conceptually sound and empirically grounded view of literacy, its acquisition, and its role in personal fulfillment.

Course Format

The course will be a combination of mini-lectures and discussion. Lectures will highlight issues cutting across the readings and/or introducing issues/research findings that supplement the readings. Discussions will focus on analysis of selected readings from theoretical, methodological, and/or practical viewpoints. Emphasis will be placed on the development of a critical appraisal of current assumptions and knowledge regarding literacy acquisition and their implications for instructional approaches.

Readings

Readings for the course are provided in dated folders under Resources on the NYU CLASSES site for Policies and Politics of Literacy Development.

Course Requirements

1. **Class participation.** Active class participation is a core component of the course. Participation includes the following:
   a. On-going critical analysis of assigned readings prior to associated course meeting and active participation in class discussions. Policy regarding missed classes: Attendance and active participation in class discussions is assumed and is a significant portion of the course grade. However, students do occasionally have legitimate reasons for missing a class. Whenever possible, students should
inform me in advance of any anticipated absence. In order to assure that students have read and reflected on the readings for a missed class, I require that you submit to me via email no later than 3 days following a missed class a set of brief informal reflections on the required readings. More than 2 class absences will lower your grade incrementally.

b. For each assigned reading, students will write 2-4 “take away” ideas (using references to the text) and bring them to class. During class discussion of the readings, students may make notes on their “take away” ideas before handing them in at the end of class. I will quickly review how students are processing the readings and discussions; however, they will not be graded. Failure to submit “take away” assignment will adversely affect the participation grade.

2. **Take Home Question #1.** You will be given a question that asks you to interestingly summarize a position that relates to your readings. This paper will act as a mid-term examination. You will be given 1 week to complete the exam.

3. **Position Statement on Literacy Policy.** A brief (approx. 2 single-spaced pages) presenting your position on government and literacy policies and interventions. What empirical research provides validation for your views?

4. **Take Home Question #2.** Same format as Question #1.

5. **Position Statement on Literacy.** An essay (approx. 3-5 double-spaced pages) presenting your personal philosophy of literacy instruction. What do you see as the most productive approach to fostering literacy in school settings? What theoretical framework informs your perspective? What empirical research provides validation for your views?

**Course Accommodations**
NYU abides by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which mandates reasonable accommodations to qualified students with disabilities. If you have a disability and may require some type of accommodation for instructional delivery or course requirements, please contact me early in the semester so that I can provide or facilitate in providing accommodations you may need. If you have not already done so, you will need to register with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities. I look forward to talking with you soon to learn how I may be helpful in enhancing your academic success in this course.

**Grading**
All assignments will be graded equally. Incompletes are not acceptable. Due dates are firm.

**SCHEDULE FOR TOPICS AND REQUIRED READINGS**

**UNIT I: POLICIES AND (POLITICS) OF LITERACY DEVELOPMENT**

In this unit, we will explore the national, state and local policies that shape literacy development. You will explore how different audiences position the world of literacy, and how certain interest groups influence policy.

**Week 1 (1/28): Course Overview; Introductions**
In this first class meeting, we will learn about each others’ backgrounds, explore participants’ goals for the course, and discuss the course structure and requirements. In addition, we will examine the differences between national, state and local policies.

Read Shonkoff, 2000. Be prepared to consider each of these three voices in a discussion.

**Week 2 (2/4): How Educational Policy Works: National, State and Local Constituencies**

Read Federal educational policy and the states;
Read NCLB.
Read Structure of the NY State School System

**Week 3: (2/11): NO CLASS. TAKE A STAND.** There are pros and cons for an active government voice in educational policy making. Using your readings, take a stand on whether you believe in big government or small government, and provide a brief rationale (using bullet points) on where you stand. (2-pager)

**Week 4 (2/18): The Current Political Scene: Teacher Development/NCLB et al., POSITION BRIEF DUE**

Guest Speaker: Steve Heuer, Government Relations, NYU, Washington DC.

**Week 5 (2/25): Case Study: The Reading First Controversy**

Read: The Reading First Controversy

DEBATE: #1

**UNIT II: FOUNDATIONAL ISSUES IN CONCEPTUALIZING LITERACY: WHY IS LITERACY SO POLITICAL?**

In this unit, we will explore definitions of literacy and major paradigms that have been used in conceptualizing and studying literacy development, with an emphasis on metaphors used in talking about literacy, key mechanisms used to explain literacy functions, and major milestones in literacy acquisition.


This week, we begin a three-week ‘tour’ of the three major theoretical perspectives within which scholars conceptualize literacy processes and practices: the so-called cognitive, sociocultural, and critical perspectives. The focus this week is on the cognitive perspective.

Gough & Tunmer, 1986

Hoover & Gough


**Week 7 (3/11): Frameworks, Part 2: The Sociocultural Tradition**

We continue our ‘tour’ of the three major perspectives for conceptualizing literacy processes and practices. Use the assigned readings to glean key implicit and explicit assumptions made by representatives of the sociocultural perspective.


Palinscar & Brown, 1984

**Week 8 (3/18): SPRING BREAK. NO CLASS**


Moje, chapter

**UNIT III: CURRENT ISSUES IN LITERACY PRACTICE AND POLICY**

In this unit, we compare selected approaches to literacy instruction, including major principles regarding instructional activities flowing from alternative theoretical frameworks, and comprehensive literacy programs. We also consider questions of policy related to instructional reform and challenges to literacy acquisition posed by selected child populations.

**Week 10 (4/1): CASE STUDY: The Reading Wars (Redux)**

http://www.theatlantic.com/past/issues/97nov/read.htm

http://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/fari-upside-down-philosophy-article-1.1575824#commentpostform

Kim, “Research and the Reading Wars”

Discussion: http://readingandwritingproject.com/about/overview.html

**Week 11: (4/8) CASE STUDY: THE WORD GAP**


Cunningham, A. & Stanovich, What reading does for the mind.


Teale & Sulzby, “Emergent Literacy”


**Week 12: (4/15) DEBATE #2**

**Week 13 (4/22): NO CLASS. QUESTION #2 (AERA Week)**

**Week 14: (4/29) CASE STUDY: What’s the Fuss? The Common Core Standards in ELA**

**Question 2 Due**

The Common Core State Standards in English/Language Arts are the newest reforms in the reading reform movement. They will certainly not be the last. Let’s explore what they are/why they are, and what our predictions might be for reading improvement.

Brooks & Dietz, The dangers and opportunities of the common core.

Hirsch, Why content?

Loveless, ‘The Common Core Initiative
Shanahan, The Common Core ate my baby


Your Literacy Philosophy is Due.