

**E55.1005 and V57.0060**  
**Introduction to American Education:**  
**Historical and Contemporary Perspectives**

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This course will introduce you to the central themes, issues, and controversies in American education. What is the purpose of “school”? How did schools begin, in the United States, and how have they evolved across time? How do children learn? How are they different from each other, and why and when should that matter? How should we teach them? And how should we structure schools and classrooms to promote learning?

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

1. Reading: Each week, I will ask you to read several articles or chapters. I expect you to complete all of the assigned reading, on time. Some of the readings will be posted on “Blackboard”; the rest will be found in the following books, which are all available in paperback at the NYU Bookstore:

Leonard Abbeduto and Frank Symons, eds., Taking Sides: Clashing Views in Educational Psychology, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (McGraw-Hill, 2010)

Jack Buckley and Mark Schneider, Charter Schools: Hope or Hype? (Princeton University Press, 2007)

Allan Collins and Richard Halverson, Rethinking Education in the Age of Technology: The Digital Revolution and Schooling in America (Teachers College Press, 2009)

Philip W. Jackson, Life in Classrooms (Teachers College Press, rev. ed., 1990)

Carl Kaestle, Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860 (Hill and Wang, 1983)

Diane Ravitch, The Death and Life of the Great American School System (Basic Books, 2010)

I will also ask you to watch the documentary film by Davis Guggenheim, “Waiting for Superman” (2010)

2. Response Papers: Each week, I will ask you to hand in a brief (2-3 pages, maximum) paper that analyzes the argument(s) of the readings and responds to the question that appears on the syllabus. Please note: I do not accept late papers.
3. Guest discussants: I regard this course as an introduction to the Steinhardt School as well as to the study and practice of education in the United States. So I plan to invite different Steinhardt professors to class, where they will share their research and insight on the questions that engage us. If there are other professors whom you would like to meet, please let me know and I will try to invite them as well.
4. Attendance: In this course, we want everyone to learn from each other. So it is imperative that you prepare for--and attend--every class, on time. If an emergency forces you to be tardy or absent, please notify me (by phone or e-mail) beforehand.

### COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. Students should be able to identify the key junctures and changes in the historical development of American public and private education.
2. Students should be able to summarize different theories of learning and to explain how these theories can influence practice.
3. Students should be able to analyze the social organization of American schools, including
  - a. the roles of students, teachers, administrators, and parents.
  - b. the function of class, race, and gender in structuring inequality.
4. Students should be able to analyze the most important controversies in contemporary education, evaluating different points of view and framing their own.

### GRADING

Response Papers: 50%

Discussion/Participation: 25%

Final Exam: 25%

### COURSE SCHEDULE

January 24: Course Introduction, I: Why Are We Here?

January 26: Course Introduction, II: A “Puritan” Heritage?

January 31: The “Founding Fathers” and the “Common Schools”  
Kaestle, Pillars of the Republic, ch. 1-3, 6-7

February 2: **RESPONSE PAPER DUE:** Suppose that Benjamin Rush, Horace Mann, and Bishop John Hughes were all running for the school board in your town. What reforms or platforms would they propose? And whom would you vote for? Why?

February 7: “Progressive” Education

William J. Reese, “The Origins of Progressive Education,” History of Education Quarterly 41:1 (Spring 2001), 1-24.

David Tyack, The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education (Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 177-268 (posted on “Blackboard”)

David F. Labaree, “Progressivism, schools and schools of education: An American Romance,” Paedagogica Historica 41:1 (2005), 275-288.

February 9: **RESPONSE PAPER DUE:** Where did “Progressive” education come from? Would you call yourself a “Progressive” educator, based on what you read here? Why or why not?

February 14: The Burden of Race: From Jim Crow to Brown v. Board of Education, and beyond

James D. Anderson, “Northern Foundations and the Shaping of Black Rural Education, 1902-1935,” History of Education Quarterly 18 (Winter 1978), 371-96.

Vanessa Siddle Walker, “Valued Segregated Schools for African-American Children in the South, 1935-1969: A Review of Common Themes and Characteristics,” Review of Educational Research 70:3 (2000), 253-285.

Jonathan Zimmerman, “Brown-ing the American Textbook: History, Psychology, and the Origins of Modern Multiculturalism,” History of Education Quarterly 44:1 (Spring 2004), 46-69.

Lisa Delpit, “The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people’s children,” Harvard Educational Review 58 (1985), 280-298.

February 16: **RESPONSE PAPER DUE:** What are the three most important things you learned about race and education from these readings? How might these insights affect your practice as a teacher?

Guest discussant: Joan Malczewski

February 21: **NO CLASS (President’s Day)**

February 23: Into the Present: Life in Schools

Jackson, Life in Classrooms

**RESPONSE PAPER DUE:** Compare Jackson’s portrait of schools to your own life as a student. How does his interpretation compare to your experiences?

Guest discussant: Rene Arcilla

February 28: Issues in Practice, I: Psychology, Pedagogy, and “Learning Differences”

Abbeduto and Symons, eds., Taking Sides:

--Issue 1: Are Single-Gender Classes Necessary to Ensure Equal Educational Opportunities for Boys and Girls?

--Issue 2: Should Struggling Students Be Retained?

--Issue 3: Is Full Inclusion Always the Best Option for Children with Disabilities?

--Issue 5: Should Schools Try to Increase Students’ Self-Esteem?

--Issue 7: Should Schools Adopt a Constructivist Approach to Education?

--Issue 9: Can Howard Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences Transform Educational Practice?

--Issue 11: Do Recent Discoveries about the Brain and its Development have Implications for Classroom Practice?

March 2: **RESPONSE PAPER DUE:** How might recent research in psychology affect how you teach?

Guest Discussant: Erin O’Connor

March 7: Issues in Practice, II: Can ‘Technology’ Save Us?

Allan Collins and Richard Halverson, Rethinking Education in the Age of Technology

March 9: **RESPONSE PAPER DUE:** Is “the digital revolution” changing education? How? And how should schools and teachers adjust to the new technologies?

Guest discussant: Jan Plass

March 14, 16: **NO CLASS (Spring Break)**

March 21: Issues in Practice, III: The “Achievement Gap”

Paul E. Barton, “Why Does the Gap Persist?”; Joshua Aronson, “The Threat of Stereotypes”; Julie Landsman, “Confronting the Racism of Low Expectations”; Janice Hale, “How Schools Shortchange African American Children”; Richard Rothstein, “The Achievement Gap: A Broader Picture”; W. James Popham, “A Game Without Winners,” all in Educational Leadership 62:3 (November 2004), special issue on “Closing Achievement Gaps.”

Abbeduto and Symons, eds., Taking Sides:

--Issue 4: Can Schools Close the Achievement Gap between Students from Different Ethnic and Racial Backgrounds?

March 23: **RESPONSE PAPER DUE**: What are the key causes and consequences of the achievement gap? As a teacher, how will you attempt to address it?

Guest Discussant: Joshua Aronson

March 28: Issues in Practice: IV: Classroom Management, Discipline, and Student (and Teacher) “Rights”

Richard Arum and Doreet Price, “Law and Disorder in the Classroom,” Education Next 9:4 (Fall 2009), 58-66.

N. Cambron-McCabe, “Balancing Students’ Constitutional Rights”; M. McCarthy, “Beyond the Wall of Separation: Church-State Concerns”; J. Sanchez, “Constitutional Cases Involving Teachers”; L.F. Berlin, “Public School Law: What Does It Mean in the Trenches?” all in Phi Delta Kappan 90:10 (June 2009), special issue on “The courts and the schools”

Abbeduto and Symons, eds., Taking Sides:

--Issue 16: Can a Zero-Tolerance Policy Lead to Safe Schools?

March 30: **RESPONSE PAPER DUE**: How has the concept of “rights” (for students, and for teachers) affected life in schools? How will the concept affect your own practice?

Guest Discussant: Richard Arum

April 4: Issues in Practice, V: The Question of Literacy

Atwell, Nancie (1987). Excerpts from In the middle: Writing, reading and learning with adolescents (pp. 53-75). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Douglass, Frederick. (1987). Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass. In H.L. Gates, Jr. (Ed.), The Classic Slave Narratives (pp. 273-281). New York: Penguin.

Hull, Glynda, & Stornaiuolo, A. (2010). Literate arts in a global world: Social networking as cosmopolitan practice. Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 54 (2), 84-96.

Abbeduto and Symons, eds., Taking Sides:

--Issue 12: Is the Whole Language Approach to Reading Effective?

April 6: **RESPONSE PAPER DUE**: What is literacy in our digital age? How might your own view of literacy influence what you do in the classroom?

Guest Discussant: David Kirkland

April 11: Challenges, I: Vouchers, Charter Schools, and “Choice”

Buckley and Schneider, Charter Schools: Hope or Hype?

April 13: **RESPONSE PAPER DUE**: Do you support the expansion of charter schools in the United States? Would you like to teach in one? Why or why not?  
Guest Discussant: Jack Buckley

April 18: Challenges, II: Preparing a New Teaching Force?

Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Christine Power, “New Directions for Teacher Preparation”; Richard Ingersoll and Lisa Merrill, “Who’s Teaching Our Children?”; Pam Grossman and Susanna Loeb, “Learning from Multiple Routes”; Ellen Behrstock-Sherratt and Jane G. Coggshall, “Realizing the Promises of Generation Y”; Wendi Lee Folz, “Recruiting Generation Y Teachers”; Renee Moore and Barnett Berry, “The Teachers of 2030”, all in Educational Leadership 67:8 (May 2010), special issue on “The Key to Changing the Teaching Profession.”

April 20: **RESPONSE PAPER DUE**: How is the American teaching profession changing? Most of all, how should it change? What kinds of reforms or practices will improve our teaching force?

Guest Discussant: Sean Corcoran

April 25: No Child Left Behind and Teacher Practice

Ravitch, The Death and Life of the Great American School System

April 27: **RESPONSE PAPER DUE**: What is Ravitch’s central critique of present-day education reform in the United States? Do you agree with the critique? Why or why not?

Guest Discussant: Diane Ravitch

May 2: Waiting for Superman? The Question of “School Reform”

Please watch the documentary film by Davis Guggenheim, “Waiting for Superman”

May 4: **RESPONSE PAPER DUE**: Please analyze the movie “Waiting for Superman,” in light of what you have learned in this course. Do you support the movie’s claims and conclusions? Which ones? Why or why not?

Guest discussant: Davis Guggenheim

May 9: Course Review

May 11: FINAL EXAM