

Why Do We Have Schools?

Fiat Lux Seminar
Wednesday, 2-2:50 pm
DODD 154

Assistant Professor Jeffrey Guhin
Haines Hall Room 296
guhin@soc.ucla.edu

Office Hours: Wednesday 10 am to noon (and by appointment)

Overview of the Course:

This course asks a question that seems to be essential to modernity itself: Why do we have schools? What do schools do and what should schools do? Should schools make students into citizens and moral individuals, should work to remedy social inequality, or is their actual role to maintain that inequality and make it appear legitimate? We will read selections from classic texts in sociology and social theory about goals of schooling and the degree to which schools actually accomplish those goals. We will discuss of stratification by race, gender, sexuality, and class, and the ways in which schooling can both weaken and strengthen those inequalities. We will discuss whether schools are responsible for making their students into good citizens and moral people, and whether public education has a necessary role in those goals. By the end of the quarter, students should have a good introduction to many ongoing conversations about why we have schools.

Grading:

Your grade will be based on participation, attendance, and three brief reflections (minimum one double-spaced page) really just to give me a sense of how you're relating to the texts and the discussion. This is a straightforward course. Do the readings and you'll be fine.

Attendance and Participation:

You should come to class able to say something that shows you've done the reading. I have a fine ear for generic comments so please bring the texts to class and refer explicitly to particular arguments in our conversation. I will take attendance each day, and more than three absences will be counted as a failure for the course. If for some reason you must be absent four or more times, please contact me to discuss it.

Difficult Subjects

There is nothing particularly graphic or descriptively intense in the readings for this class, though it is still possible you may find some of the topics we discuss difficult or painful. I will try to be mindful as I describe the readings beforehand, and if you believe you are not able to do some of the readings for any reason, psychological or otherwise, please let me know.

Contacting Me

I'm at the e-mail above. Please e-mail all reflections directly to that e-mail address, and ask me any questions there as well. I'm in my office basically every day so please feel free to come by!

Syllabus

(note: listed readings must be completed *by and for* the day under which they're listed.)

Week 1, September 28: What We're Doing, How We'll Do it, Why It Matters
Overview of the Course, Discussion of Course Themes

Week 2, October 5: How is schooling any different from just growing up?
Democracy and Education by John Dewey, chapters 3, 4, 7 (23-44, 64-77)

Week 3, October 12: What should be the aims of schooling in a democracy?
Democracy and Education by John Dewey, chapters 8-10 (78-106)

First Reflection Due midnight, Monday October 17

Week 4, October 19: What are the different ways to become successful?
"The Forms of Capital" by Pierre Bourdieu

Week 5, October 26: How do differing understandings of success intersect with racism?
Keepin' It Real by Prudence Carter, preface, chapter 1 (v-xii, 19-46)

Week 6, November 2: What is a democratic education?
Democratic Education by Amy Gutmann, preface, introduction (xi-xiv, 3-18)

Week 7, November 9: How should the state be involved in schools?
Democratic Education by Amy Gutmann, chapter 1 (20-47)

Second Reflection Due midnight, Monday November 14

Week 8, November 16: Does character matter in schools?
The Death of Character by James Davison Hunter, postmortem, chapters 1 and 2 (xiii-xv, 3-27)

Week 9, November 23: Does grit matter in schools?
How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character, chapter 2 (49-104)

Week 10, November 30: Against grit.

1. "The problem with teaching 'grit' to poor kids? They already have it. Here's what they really need." By Valerie Strauss, *Washington Post*
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2016/05/10/the-problem-with-teaching-grit-to-poor-kids-they-already-have-it-heres-what-they-really-need/>
2. "Teaching Kids 'Grit' is All the Rage. Here's What's Wrong With It." By Jeffrey Aaron Snyder. *The New Republic*.
<https://newrepublic.com/article/117615/problem-grit-kipp-and-character-based-education>
3. "In praise of Dewey." By Nicholas Tampio. *Aeon*.
<https://aeon.co/essays/dewey-knew-how-to-teach-democracy-and-we-must-not-forget-it>

Third Reflection Due midnight, Monday December 5