EDST 570—022--SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION and its DISCONTENTS

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course asks: is the sociology of education a unified field of foundational theories to study the institutional processes and outcomes of formal education? Alternatively or conversely, is it a normatively contested field, transformed and informed by social movements and their related changing theoretical perspectives to frame what counts as power, culture, economy, and society? How do the boundaries of the discipline get redrawn in relation competing understandings of the social organization of knowledge, social processes and unequal outcomes of schooling and education? An introductory overview of what some consider to be the central theoretical trends and debates in the field will be offered, as well competing or conflicting cross currents which discontent the 'stable' and staple of key theoretical approaches. Some argue that sociology is a traditional discipline that embraces normative concepts of the state and society and has not kept up with contemporary debates about the constitution of the ‘subject’ (e.g. the nature of self/subjectivity, identities and ‘post-state’ formations in relation to the contributions of feminist, post-structural, anti-colonial and critical disability studies approaches to the social organization of knowledge, subjectivities, and power). Others argue that contemporary sociology today is not unified body of canonical or foundational knowledge. Do all theoretical frameworks get equal time and space in our educational institutions?

In this course, we will learn that sociology of education is a newly configured and historically dynamic field of knowledge, contested from within and without, constituting a range of theoretical perspectives and debates. Assessing the plural and contested notions of the field of the sociology of education in this contemporary will aid in both our application of sociological concepts, as well as our understanding of sociology's relationship to both education and social thought. Some key conceptions of schools as places of status attainment, meritocratic sites of input and output; liberal places for all to compete for equal opportunities or contested spaces in which struggles for equality of condition and justice are linked to broader social struggles outside schools and education will be discussed. How do interested and normatively organized relations of social class, gender, sexuality, dis/ability as well as processes of racialization, ableism, heterosexism, and global inequalities challenge what constitutes the so-called ‘foundational’ theoretical traditions? A relational perspective will be taken, incorporating insights from the cross-currents in hybrid and sometimes conflicting traditions within and across feminist, materialist, post-structural and anti-colonial theory, disability studies and cultural studies. Productive, as well as irreconcilable tensions between and among theoretical/political/disciplinary traditions will be discussed.